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THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

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THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO
DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

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INTRODUCTION

WHY WE LOVE D&D

FROM COTTAGE INDUSTRY TO POP CULTURE PHENOMENON, THE RISE OF DUNGEONS & DRAGONS HAS BEEN AN ADVENTURE

BY JORDAN ZAKARIN

The corridors are dark, the party is exhausted and HP is perilously low. Still, you press on—hours of relentless grinding, spell-casting and negotiating with evil mages have brought you deep into this dungeon, edging nearer and nearer to the wizard's tomb. The quest has unfurled in a maze of carefully designed chaos, but it never fails to catch you off-guard when an Orc suddenly begins an attack. You have to roll for initiative and think fast—after all, tens of thousands of people could be watching the battle on a live stream broadcast to paying fans around the world.

Created in 1973 by tabletop game enthusiasts Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson, Dungeons & Dragons began as a self-published role-playing game (RPG) that has since brought high fantasy to kitchen tables and turned suburban dens into forbidden forests and otherworldly planes. D&D's current prevalence in our pop culture zeitgeist was hardly predetermined, and in fact feels more like the product of a dozen natural 20 rolls of the dice. The game's inspirations were originally drawn from a subculture of tabletop games and centuries of European myths and folktales, not to mention early-to-mid-century fantasy novels such as J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. Elves, wizards, mages and orcs were hardly at the center of social imagination. And beyond its niche subject matter, the game required a 112-page rulebook, endless hours of diligent note-taking and frequent use of a calculator—hardly an invitation to mass popularity.

And yet a hardcore fan base spread the gospel, first at hobby stores and then conventions, with the game's always-gorgeous artwork and entrancing lore slowly drawing in curious minds seeking adventure and escape. Players can take on any form and yield any weapon while seeking out glory in worlds intricately designed by the world's most accomplished fantasy creators—or by their dungeon master friends. It is a unique sort of freedom that even the most cutting edge video game cannot deliver.

Though its publishers have been beset by various financial and personnel woes, Dungeons & Dragons has continued to expand over the past 50 years while also setting the template for generations of new games, movies and literature. In a game that plays out in the imagination, the possibilities are endless.

CHAPTER

1

THE

PHENOMENON

PART ONE

SATANIC PANIC?

D&D MOVED BEYOND ITS DEMONS TO SAVE THE WORLD

BY COREY PLANTE

MADE FOR TV
The story of 16-year-old prodigy James Dallas Egbert III was fictionalized in the 1981 novel *Mazes and Monsters* and its 1982 made-for-television adaptation, which starred Tom Hanks (far right).

In May 2021, the playing card company Wizards of the Coast issued a press release touting Dungeons & Dragons' year of unprecedented success. Sales of new game manuals and other accessories had soared by 33% in 2020 and another 17% to that point in 2021. But the number that really caught the eye was Wizards' claim that 50 million people had played D&D since its quiet introduction back in 1974.

The statistic is almost inherently impossible to certify for a game that follows an oral tradition and takes place largely at untraceable tables. But the precise number is beside the point—by any measure, it's impossible to deny that Dungeons & Dragons had become a gigantic cultural sensation, something that its first generation of devotees would have never predicted. The journey to this point did not begin auspiciously, as D&D was quickly caught in a moral panic during a time of societal malaise.

In 1979, a 16-year-old prodigy named James Dallas Egbert III disappeared from his Michigan State University room. Soon after, Egbert's parents hired a private investigator to shake loose clues that might help track down their son. The investigator discovered what was thought to be a bone-chilling secret: Egbert played D&D. The revelation triggered grim fantasies, many of which involved Dungeons & Dragons somehow causing his murder.

The story gained national attention, with many outlets drawing a connection between the then-

FAMILY REUNION
James Egbert II (opposite page, right) was joined by private investigator William Dear at a September 1979 press conference after the recovery of Egbert's 16-year-old son, James III (below).

MASS MEDIA PAINTED A PARTICULAR PICTURE OF D&D

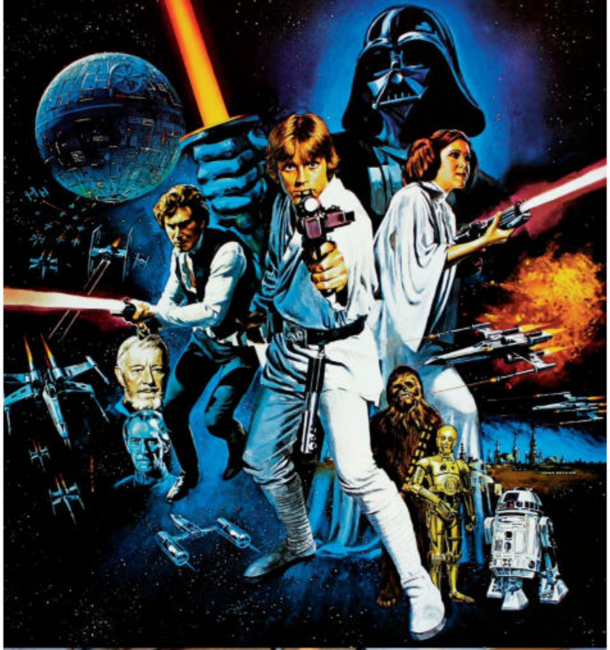
obscure game and the teenager's erratic behavior. In reality, prolonged depression and drug abuse had made Egbert suicidal. He was found shortly thereafter, but the young prodigy took his own life a year later. In short, this was a mental health tragedy, but the mass media had already painted a particular picture of D&D—a public perception that wasn't easy to shake.

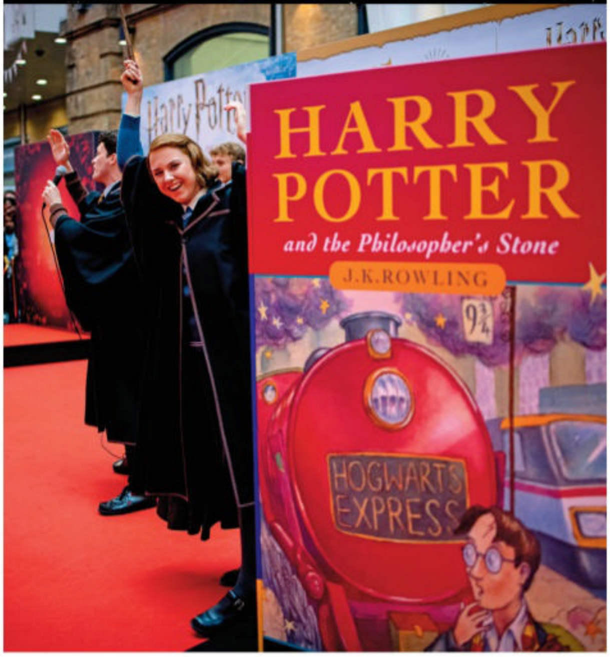
Egbert's story was fictionalized in the 1981 novel *Mazes and Monsters* and its 1982 made-for-television adaptation, which starred Tom Hanks. In 1983, a woman named Patricia Pulling attempted to sue the publisher of Dungeons & Dragons for her son's suicide; the suits were tossed, but she continued her crusade against the game by forming an organization called Bothered About Dungeons and Dragons.

Patricia Pulling was a conservative Christian, and her fight was echoed by clergy of the era. "The game is an occult tool that opens up young people to influence or possession by demons," Pastor Jon Quigley, of the Lakeview Full Gospel Fellowship, thundered in 1985.

What happened next? How did D&D, a game shunned and condemned by a seeming majority of Americans in the mid-'80s, morph from a niche hobby to having a significant presence in the mainstream zeitgeist? In some ways, the answer is simple: Nerdy stuff became cool.

PLAYING THEIR ROLES
Mazes and Monsters is about a group of college students and their interest in a fictitious role-playing game of the same name.





NERD CULTURE
The launch of J.K. Rowling's first *Harry Potter* novel, the return of *Star Wars* and Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* film trilogy all brought wizards, magic and mythical creatures to the fore.

The launch of J.K. Rowling's first *Harry Potter* novel, the return of *Star Wars* and Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* film trilogy all brought wizards, magic and mythical creatures to the fore, helping to turn comic book conventions—where tabletop games had thrived for decades—into national, Hollywood-worthy events now known as Comic Cons.

All of this set the stage for Dungeons & Dragons to thrive, though it took some time to seize the moment. By 2012, a series of public playtests helped to fine-tune those issues for the fifth edition of the game, which wound up emphasizing role-playing and easier combat mechanics.

In addition to making the game more accessible to players, the new edition made it more attractive to listeners and onlookers. What was once a fantasy that unfurled simply in the imaginations of those at the table soon became a streaming sensation. Charismatic storytellers put their games online, streaming their spoken-word adventures and building massive audiences that hang on every roll. Shows such as *Critical Role* turned lesser-known voice actors and game devotees into Twitch sensations and convention rockstars.

Then COVID-19 hit, and D&D was positioned as the ideal interactive hobby to keep people connected. Free digital tools and fluency with Zoom were all that was needed to fill endless hours of quarantine.

The game's popularity soared in particular with millennials and Gen Z. According to official data from Wizards of the Coast, 40% of the D&D player base belongs to Gen Z, which is in turn having outsized influence on the game's direction.

Wizards has gone out of its way to correct insensitive stereotypes and portrayals that have so often been found within classic fantasy settings. Traditionally, evil races like Orcs and Goblins were often coded as people of color. But in response to backlash, newer updates to the games emphasize diversity, representation and flexibility.

Gender identity, sexuality, moral alignment and even innate racial skills are malleable where they were once rigid, further transforming D&D into an ideal world in a culture battling moral panics that are much more real than fantasy. Suddenly, it was not only OK to enjoy playing D&D—it was cool.

NEW SENSATIONS Shows such as *Critical Role* (opposite page) turned lesser-known voice actors and game devotees into Twitch sensations and convention rockstars.

GOING MAINSTREAM Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* film trilogy (below) helped turn comic book conventions into national, Hollywood-worthy events now known as Comic Cons.

> THE ANSWER IS SIMPLE: NERDY STUFF BECAME COOL

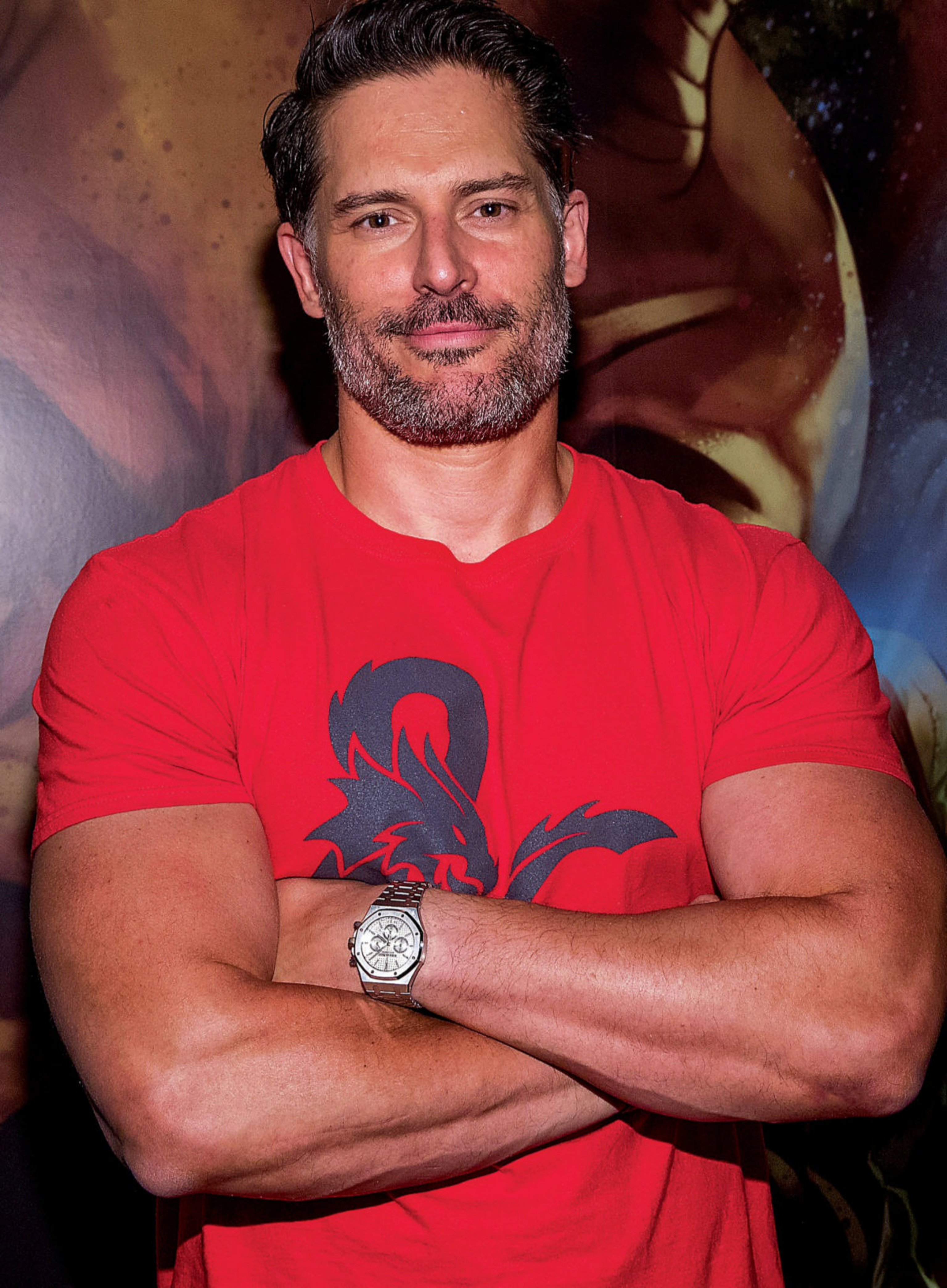
PART TWO

LOUD AND PROUD

LOTS OF PEOPLE PLAY D&D—INCLUDING CELEBRITIES

BY JAMES GREBEY

TOMB OF ANNIHILATION
Joe Manganiello helps unveil the new Dungeons & Dragons storyline, "Tomb of Annihilation" during a live streaming event at The House Studios in Seattle on June 2, 2017.



For most D&D players, the game is an opportunity for wish fulfillment: the long arc of a campaign will see their characters go from small-town nobodies to epic, realm-saving heroes, earning fame across the land for their exploits. But for others, the opposite is true: D&D is a "simple" pleasure that can be an escape from a life of vast acclaim and international notoriety.

Hollywood loves a trend, and as D&D continues to experience a popular resurgence, more and more celebrities are getting in on the action—or happily revealing that they were playing D&D before it was cool. Some even admit that D&D helped shape the way they perform or tell stories.

Perhaps the biggest and most vocal celebrity champion is actor Joe Manganiello, known for playing good-hearted tough guys in *True Blood, Magic Mike* and *Justice League*. Back when Manganiello was in high school, he played three seasons of varsity sports and then would go home to be the Dungeon Master for his friends' long-running campaign. Instead of hiding his basement adventures, Manganiello promised to protect his buddies should any of his jock teammates give them grief at school. He was big and persuasive enough to ensure there would be little bullying.

Manganiello continues to be a big part of the Dungeons & Dragons community, even working as a consultant for the game. (His character, the

DRAGON HEIST
Deborah Ann Woll (left) helped unveil the Dungeons & Dragons storyline, "Waterdeep: Dragon Heist" during a live streaming event on June 1, 2018.

BIG BANG
A *Big Bang Theory* episode called "The D&D Vortex," which features several guests (below) playing themselves, drew 13.48 million viewers when it first aired in 2019.

dragonborn paladin Arkhan the Cruel, made it into an official D&D adventure.)

Manganiello also has a way of bringing other celebrity D&D players to the table. For two years, he DMed a regular campaign titled "The War of Dragons" in his tricked-out basement. While the initial roster of players mostly consisted of Hollywood screenwriters (Manganiello himself co-wrote an unproduced D&D screenplay), the party started picking up some A-listers when Rage Against the Machine frontman Tom Morello joined.

Vince Vaughn, *Game of Thrones* showrunners David Benioff and Dan Weiss, pro wrestler Paul "The Big Show" Wight, *Saturday Night Live*'s Taran Killam and *Guardians of the Galaxy* director James Gunn have also sat at Manganiello's table. Chuck D. of the pioneering rap group Public Enemy went so far as to draw custom portraits of all the players' characters.

"It's similar to what a high-stakes poker game might be," Morello told *Variety*. "It's a game where friends gather that's taken deadly seriously and is a lot of fun."

Although it attracted attention, Manganiello's epic campaign stayed in his basement, but other celebrity D&D players have made their games into a public spectacle. Deborah Ann Woll, Manganiello's *True Blood* co-star and *Daredevil* actress, is one of many DMs who broadcasts their games as a popular series on Twitch. Dan Harmon, the creator of *Rick and Morty*, had a web series called *HarmonQuest* that animated a zany D&D campaign. Several celebrities, including Elizabeth Olsen, Aubrey Plaza and Kumail Nanjiani, guest starred on *HarmonQuest* across its three seasons. *Scream* and *Scooby-Doo* star Matthew Lillard co-founded a company that makes deluxe editions of Dungeons & Dragons and other geeky games like Magic the Gathering.

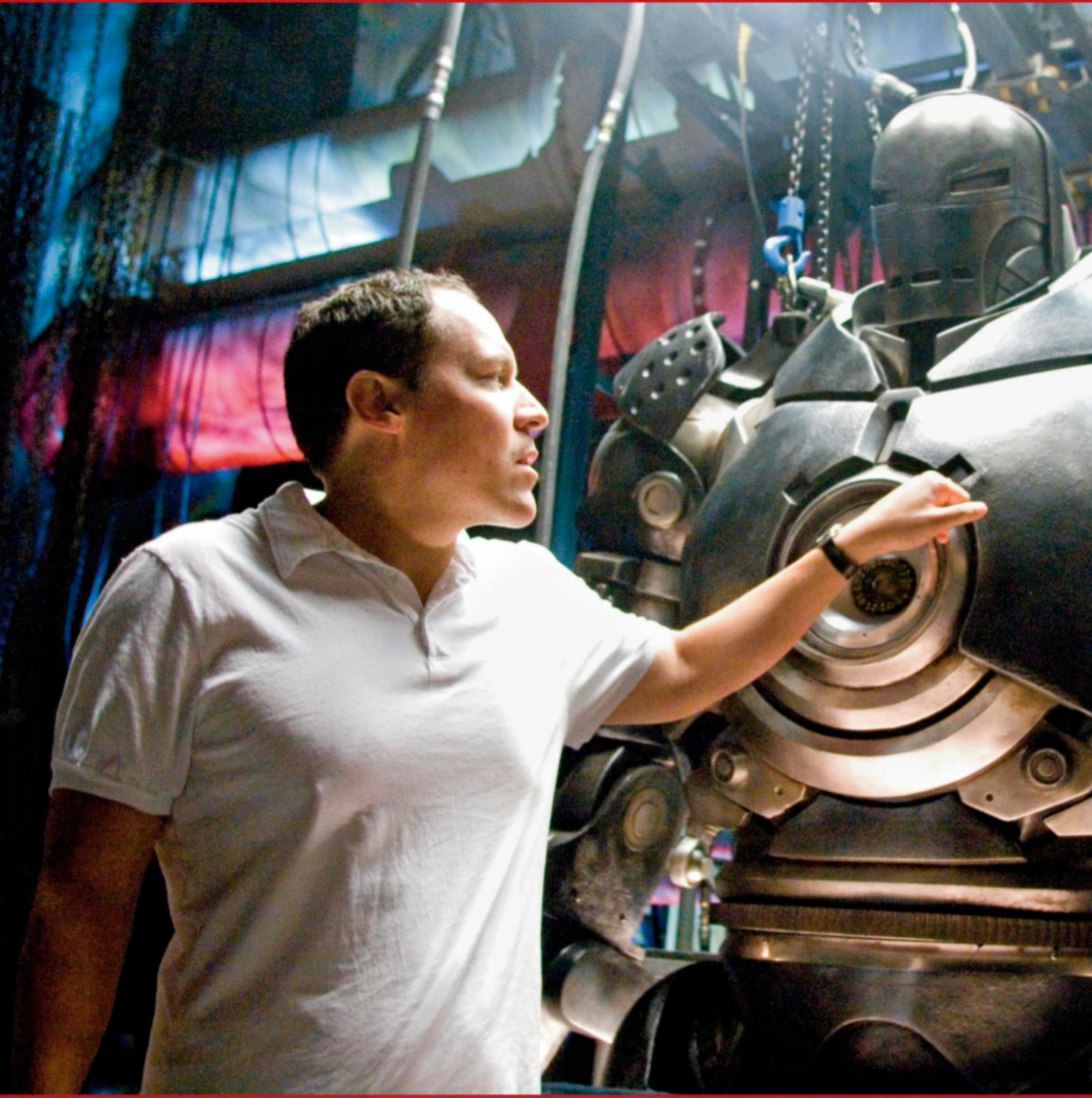
Not every D&D-loving celebrity makes a business out of it. My Chemical Romance frontman Gerard Way is a longtime fan of the game, and he celebrated his 43rd birthday by rolling some dice and adventuring with friends and family. Former NBA star Tim Duncan was

HARMONQUEST
Dan Harmon (below, left), the creator of *Rick and Morty*, had a web series called *HarmonQuest* that animated a zany D&D campaign.

COLBERT REPORT
In addition to famously being a *Lord of the Rings* fan, Stephen Colbert (below, right) is a D&D fan dating back to the game's early days.

BUDDING ROMANCE
My Chemical Romance frontman Gerard Way is a longtime fan of Dungeons & Dragons.

DRAWING INSPIRATION Jon Favreau, director of *Iron Man* and an executive producer on *The Mandalorian*, credited D&D with helping him become the filmmaker he is today.



IT'S SIMILAR TO WHAT A HIGH-STAKES POKER GAME MIGHT BE

such a big fantasy and D&D fan that he wanted his nickname to be "Merlin" when he first started playing.

Stephen Colbert, in addition to famously being a *Lord of the Rings* superfan, is also a D&D fan dating back to the game's early days. In 1979, he attended the tabletop game convention Gen Con and walked away with a copy of the first *Dungeon Master's Guide* signed by the game's co-creator, Gary Gygax. Since becoming famous, he's played a couple of D&D games for charity.

It's not hard to see how Dungeons & Dragons—a game where players invent whole fantasy worlds and make up an epic story together while thinking on their feet the whole time—might have influenced some of the people making blockbusters today. Jon Favreau, who directed *Iron Man* and *The Mandalorian*, credited the game with helping him become the filmmaker he is today during an appearance on *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* (Kimmel, for what it's worth, copped to drawing his buddy's D&D characters when he was a kid, though he never played himself.)

"It did help me," Favreau said. "You're putting on a show."

While there are many celebrities who play D&D—and more who are getting into it as the game gets more and more popular—it's important to remember that, in this case, stars really are just like us. It doesn't matter how famous you are: If you roll a 1 while fighting a dragon, you're toast.

PART THREE

ON THE BIG SCREEN

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE NEW MOVIE, *HONOR AMONG THIEVES*

BY ERIC FRANCISCO

COMING SOON
At San Diego Comic-Con in July 2022, Paramount rolled out a new poster for the upcoming movie *Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves*, scheduled to hit theaters in spring 2023.

Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves, the latest blockbuster adaptation of the classic tabletop game, is scheduled to hit the big screen in spring 2023. Paramount Pictures premiered the movie's trailer at San Diego Comic-Con in July 2022, sparking hope among fans that this film could be the one to finally do justice to the game's epic action and expansive lore.

The movie features an all-star cast of Chris Pine (*Star Trek*), Michelle Rodriguez (*Fast & Furious)*, Regé-Jean Page (*Bridgerton*), Sophia Lillis (*It*) and Hugh Grant (*Paddington 2*), and was co-directed by action-comedy experts Jonathan Goldstein and John Francis Daley. There's a lot to be excited about, though admittedly, the bar for a good D&D movie has been set shockingly low.

Fans of Dungeons & Dragons know well the rocky history the franchise has had in theaters. Back in 2000, the first D&D movie, with a cast that included Marlon Wayans as a thief and Jeremy Irons as a master mage, bombed hard at the box office. Made for $45 million, the movie took in just $38 million around the world. To add insult to injury, *Empire* magazine voted *Dungeons & Dragons* the 39th worst movie of all time in 2010.

Somehow, the flop spawned two sequels, one released in 2005 (*Wrath of the Dragon God*) and the other in 2012 (*The Book of Vile Darkness)*. These films looked even worse and tanked even harder than the first installment.

Honor Among Thieves aims to finally right those previous wrongs. Taking place in the official Dungeons & Dragons campaign setting of the Forgotten Realms, *Honor Among Thieves* follows a group of misfit adventurers who accidentally unleash a monstrous evil. In order to undo their mistake, they embark on a perilous quest to steal a powerful and ancient relic.

ALL-STAR CAST
Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves features a star-studded cast that includes Chris Pine (below), as well as (opposite page, top to bottom) Michelle Rodriguez, Hugh Grant and Regé-Jean Page.

At the Comic-Con sneak peak, Paramount showed two clips of the movie that teased a masterful combination of humor, spectacle and impressively deep knowledge of D&D lore. In one of the scenes, the heroes use the spell "Speak with the Dead" to interrogate a corpse, a bit of magic that does not exactly go according to plan. Just as D&D's magic is subject to a strict rulebook around the table at home, so too is the sorcery in the big-screen version of the quest.

Another scene, set in a gladiatorial maze, shows the core characters competing with other adventuring parties—including one very familiar group that fans know as the characters from the classic *Dungeons & Dragons* animated series.

Spotting Easter Eggs makes a fun side quest for longtime fans and dungeon masters, but the filmmakers were very aware that telling a cohesive, exciting story is always the first priority.

"We knew we wanted to make a heist film," co-director Daley told the web publication Inverse. (Fun fact: Daley also played a D&D nerd in the cult

FANTASY FLOP
The first D&D movie—with a cast that included Thora Birch (opposite page, top), Jeremy Irons and Marlon Wayans—bombed in 2000.

DIRECT TO DVD
The sequel to the first D&D movie, 2005's direct-to-DVD *Wrath of the Dragon God* (opposite page, bottom), was directed by Gerry Lively.

PROMISING LINEUP
With a cast that includes Chris Pine and Michelle Rodriguez (below), *Honor Among Thieves* is likely to be the best D&D movie yet.

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS
L'ONOR LAD
DRAGON BREW

FREAKS & GEEKS
Honor Among Thieves co-director John Francis Daley (above, left) played a D&D nerd in the cult comedy TV series *Freaks & Geeks.*

ALL-INCLUSIVE
"We never want to alienate those who aren't familiar with the game," said co-director Jonathan Goldstein, pictured here with producer Jeremy Latcham (far left) and co-director John Francis Daley (center).

SPOTTING EASTER EGGS MAKES A FUN SIDE QUEST FOR FANS

comedy TV series *Freaks & Geeks*.) "We thought that was really juicy territory to explore. The big challenge was whittling it down and making sure it didn't feel like it was going all over the place, or grasping too much at too many ideas and becoming overwhelming."

"It was very important to us to make a movie that hardcore fans could enjoy, but we never want to alienate those who aren't familiar with the game," added co-director Goldstein. "If you go too far down that Easter Egg rabbit hole, you start to lose some non-fans ... We wanted to make sure we were playing to both [kinds of audiences]."

Fans will know by spring 2023 if *Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves* truly has honor in its soul. While everything shown thus far looks promising, D&D fans understand that all it takes is one bad roll for everything to fall apart. But whether it's an instant classic, a misunderstood gem or an atrocious mistake, the best thing a D&D movie can deliver is a ton of fun.

THE GAME

CHAPTER

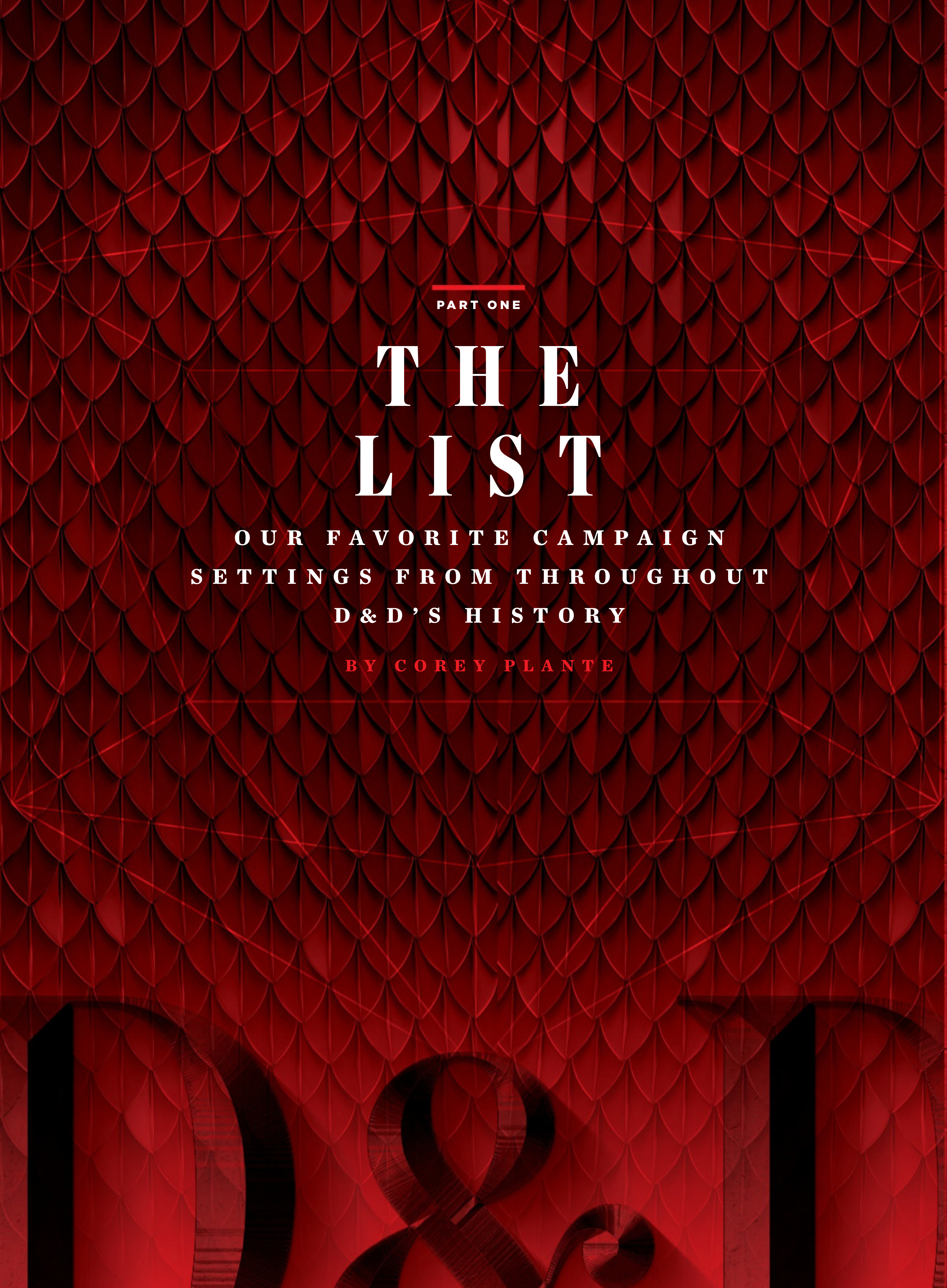
2

PART ONE

THE LIST

OUR FAVORITE CAMPAIGN SETTINGS FROM THROUGHOUT D&D'S HISTORY

BY COREY PLANTE



You've chosen your character, picked your starting attributes and spent more time developing their personality than you'd like to admit. Now it's time to set off on an adventure... but to where? The emphasis on imagination means that you can technically go anywhere in D&D, but to play an actual game, you'll need a guide for your campaign.

A campaign is an ongoing storyline led by a designated player—the Dungeon Master—who has the blueprint for the terrain, enemies and unexpected encounters to come. In many cases, the DM cooks up a fantastical journey of their own creation, which is known as a homebrewed campaign.

Because the game was initially designed for a small group of hardcore tabletop gamers, co-creator Gary Gygax figured that everyone would want to homebrew their own campaigns, but as the game grew in popularity and the public sought easier access points, Gygax was persuaded to publish his own creation.

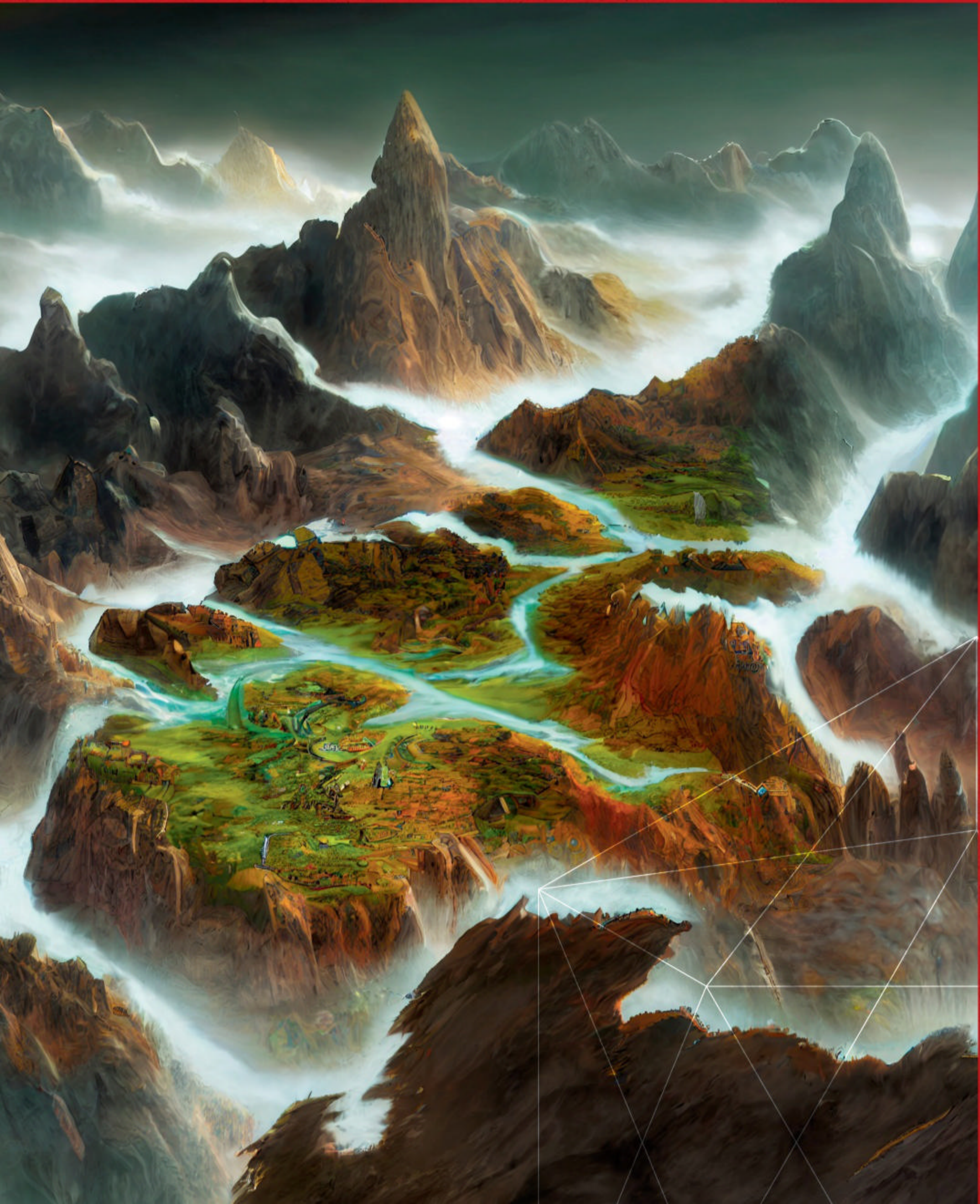
World of Greyhawk became the first official published Campaign Setting in 1980, with many more ready-made universes, worlds, continents and caverns to follow.

But for people who want to dive right in or embark on journeys designed by the game's most creative minds, D&D always provided a variety of ready-made settings to explore.

By selecting a Campaign Setting, a DM has instant access to entire history-rich worlds upon which to design their party's adventure. There are no firm rules to utilizing the Campaign Settings, but they all come with their own considerations. A DM may choose a setting where magic is prevalent, or one where technology has overtaken the realm. Some contain diverse civilizations, while others are sparsely populated or dominated by a single race of people (or creatures). Urban, rural, dark dungeons, underwater, deep forests—settings cover them all.

There is no shortage of official Campaign Settings produced and sold by Wizards of the Coast, so if you're considering what Campaign Setting to use in your next adventure, here's a rundown of some of the best and what sets them apart.

CHAPTER 2



1. EXANDRIA

The smash hit D&D live-play series *Critical Role* unravels across Exandria, one of the newest and most robust campaign settings available. A cataclysmic war between gods and mortals known as the Calamity rocked Exandria centuries ago, and as a result, the gods are banished from the mortal world. For fans of the show, this is the ultimate campaign setting, as it delivers the fantasy of fighting alongside—or against—beloved *Critical Role* characters. But you don't have to be a fan to enjoy it, either. Exandria is a unique world brimming with unique schools of magic and interesting political dynamics to explore.
5e sourcebooks: *Explorer's Guide to Wildemount, Critical Role: Call of the Netherdeep*

2. RAVNICA

In this setting adapted from the trading card game Magic: The Gathering, a single sprawling metropolis brimming with magic is governed by 10 powerful guilds. Ravnica's robust industrial ecosystem is ripe for conflicts and adventures of all kinds. There are politics, alliances and strategic betrayals, making it a setting that appeals in particular to those fans of the psychological aspects of the adventure. If you love the camping and traveling aspects of D&D, there are probably some better options, but it's worth a try regardless.
5e sourcebooks: *Guildmasters' Guide to Ravnica*

3. STRIXHAVEN

You may never get to Hogwarts or any of the many magical schools that have populated literature, film and TV since Harry Potter took the world by storm, but thanks to this campaign setting, you can role play as a spell-casting student. The Strixhaven campaign, also adapted from Magic: The Gathering, asks players to join one of five distinct colleges: Lorehold, Prismari, Quandrix, Witherbloom and Silverquill. Once you're enrolled, it's time to navigate the rules and social structures while seeking adventure and a little trouble—a bit like any other school, really.
5e sourcebooks: *Strixhaven: A Curriculum of Chaos*

4. DRAGONLANCE

“Dragonlance” refers to the powerful magical weapons used to destroy evil dragons within this classic D&D setting. While it’s not necessarily the most original title for a weapon or campaign, Dragonlance has delivered for gamers for years. Originally created by Laura and Tracy Hickman in the ’80s for their own stories, Dragonlance has since evolved into one of the most popular settings thanks to an ongoing series of novels set in its world called Krynn. The world is teeming with 10,000 years of history and sprawling conflicts, which makes it entrancing for those looking for a long-term game with details galore. An upcoming module is set to introduce Dragonlance formally to 5th edition, bringing with it mechanics to wage a continent-spanning war.
5e sourcebooks: *Dragonlance: Shadow of the Dragon Queen*

5. THEROS

A love letter to Greek history and mythology, Theros is another Magic: The Gathering setting that made its way into D&D via a 5th edition sourcebook. Unlike in most other settings, the gods of this universe are active participants in the affairs of mortals. Passionate, powerful and tremendously flawed, they’re also not above getting mortals involved in petty squabbles or righteous adventures. The divine intervention adds an interesting wrinkle to the experience, though on the downside, race options in the official materials are limited to things like centaurs, tritons and minotaurs… if you care about following the rules.
5e sourcebooks: *Mythic Odysseys of Theros*

6. DARK SUN

One of the few D&D settings to not yet receive a 5th edition adaptation, Dark Sun is set in a world where arcane magic has destroyed the planet, leaving the remaining tribes to fight for scarce resources. All that’s left is a desert wasteland that emphasizes divine and psionic magic. Imagine a cross between *Mad Max* and D&D, and you’ve got a good idea of what to expect here. But beware, the thrill of navigating the post-apocalypse comes with limits on the magic you can use, along with typically higher stakes.

7. GREYHAWK

D&D creator Gary Gygax developed Greyhawk as an authentic version of medieval times, which was a far cry from high fantasy. The campaign emphasizes feudal dynamics in a low-magic, low-technology world. It began as a single castle with a sprawling dungeon underneath, but evolved over time into a sort of alternate earth full of intriguing plot hooks without much in the way of concrete lore. Sadly, 5th edition has yet to incorporate Greyhawk beyond a few scant mentions in official materials.

8. SPELLJAMMER

A truly unique Campaign Setting just recently introduced to D&D 5th edition with a new set of official materials, Spelljammer places its fantasy in a world of science fiction. Parties will travel the stars aboard their very own Spelljammer ship to explore alien worlds, fight pirates and crawl space dungeons. The overall tone of the setting leans towards the campy, so for anyone who may want to play a *Guardians of the Galaxy*-type D&D adventure, look no further. If pulpy lightheartedness isn't how you roll, perhaps look elsewhere.

5e sourcebooks: *Spelljammer: Adventures in Space*

9. FEYWILD

Wicked and whimsical, the Feywild is technically part of the Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting. The Feywild is known for its lush and chaotic natural beauty, drawing on real-world folklore including fiction like William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. All fey originated here, including the first elves that migrated to Faerûn, where the majority of D&D stories take place. The unpredictable magic in this corner of the Prime Material Plane gives the Feywild a dreamy (and sometimes nightmarish) feel, though the instability of it all tends to make playing a bit complex.

5e sourcebooks: *The Wild Beyond the Witchlight*

10.
FORGOTTEN REALMS

Ostensibly the default setting for the vast majority of D&D stories, the Forgotten Realms encompass everything on the continent of Faerûn, including iconic cities like Waterdeep, Baldur's Gate and the frigid realm of Icewind Dale. As the most commonly used setting, there is a vast assortment of resources available to supplement campaigns, so there's no shortage of adventures that DMs can design. At the same time, it may start to bore experienced DMs.
5e sourcebooks: There are many, but consider *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist*, *Ghosts of Saltmarsh*, *Candlekeep Mysteries* or *Icewind Dale: Rime of the Frostmaiden*

11. RAVENLOFT

D&D's classic horror setting, Ravenloft is filled with vampires, the undead and myriad other creepy creatures of the night. Its haunting lore is most famously found in *Curse of Strahd*, a sharply written gothic horror tale about a vampire lord and his reincarnated lover. It's one the most acclaimed adventures in 5th edition and a must-play. Ravenloft has also been supplemented by newer materials over the years, with adventures including everything from zombie outbreaks to a *Hunger Games*-style battle royale. It may not be for everyone, but the people who like it are going to love it.
5e sourcebooks: *Curse of Strahd*, *Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft*

12. EBERRON

Eberron is a pulpy setting at the fringe of steampunk where technology has evolved enough that airships, lightning rail trains and robot-like Warforged humanoids made of wood and metal pervade the land and skies. (You might call it "magitek.") Eberron also serves as the origin of the Artificer class, a tinkerer that can be anything from a mad scientist master of potions to a demolitions expert who makes magical gadgets. It's not the brightest fantasy setting, but a celebration of a very particular genre.
5e sourcebooks: *Eberron: Rising from the Last War*

PART TWO

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

CHARACTER CLASS COMBINATIONS EVERY PLAYER SHOULD TRY (AT LEAST ONCE)

BY EMILY GAUDETTE

Putting together a team of misfit warriors is one of the great tropes of cinema, and the Dungeons & Dragons equivalent, developing your party's class combinations, is equally as exciting.

Many players like to develop their own characters in full before gathering with their buddies, and that means the party they end up with can feel a little unbalanced. Imagine four rogues sneaking around a dungeon, trailed by a single orc barbarian whose heavy armor clanks loudly enough to warn every goblin in the area. If that's not cinematic dramatic tension, we don't know what is.

Disaster and dysfunction can be fun to play, but if you want to focus on taking the adventure as far as possible, it'll require a more cohesive party with complementary qualities. Your Dungeon Master will likely throw enemies of many different sorts at you, which means a player's abilities will either help or hinder them depending on the encounter. As a result, it's best to keep things balanced. Classic Dungeons & Dragons strategy suggests that players try to choose a healer, a spellcaster and a meat shield, which is D&D speak for a wall of muscle.

PALADIN & ROGUE

This is your classic good cop, bad cop routine. The paladin is devoted to justice and righteousness above all else. They study for years, and are often called by a particular god to defend the weak. A paladin will put themselves in danger merely because it's the right thing to do. They don't even care about getting paid.

On the other hand, a rogue is a stealthy lurker. They might speak thieves cant, and they certainly weren't coddled by any deity-loyal training programs. By trade, they're often con artists, assassins or monster exterminators. They *do* care about getting paid.

Roleplaying these two as opposites adds an instant spark and edge to the adventure. D&D is filled with thorny topics that party members must thrash out on the fly, and when it comes to moral arguments about stealing, plotting and allying the party with one NPC over another, the paladin and rogue will guarantee some intensity.

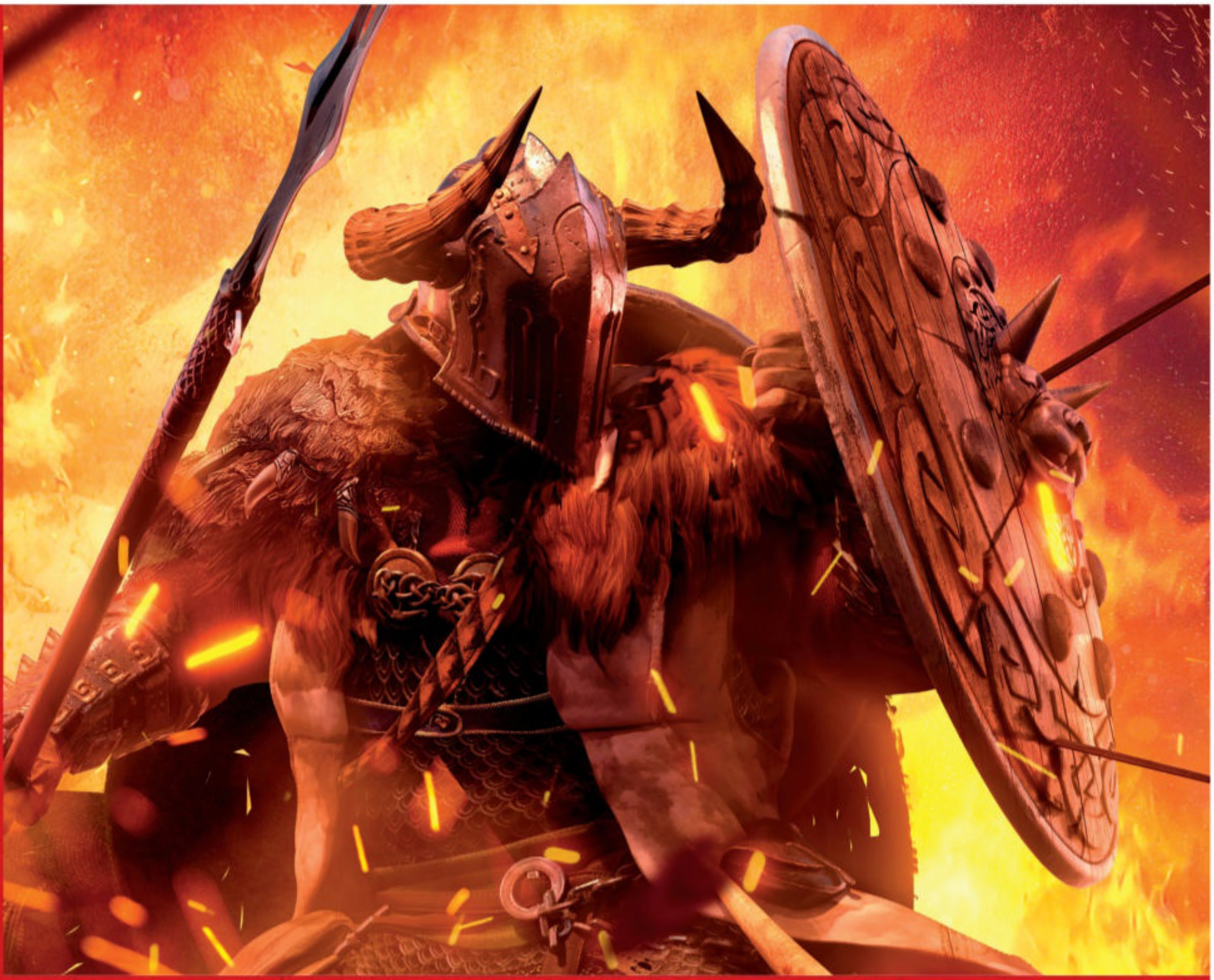
WIZARD & BARBARIAN

Here's another classic character dynamic, an odd couple that pairs the big slow guy and smart-aleck little dude. Think *Young Frankenstein*, *Pinky and the Brain* or Steinbeck's classic *Of Mice and Men*... although, hopefully your campaign doesn't end like that last one. Steer clear of rabbits, just to be sure.

In D&D, a wizard is an extremely intelligent scholar of the arcane. They gain their abilities through years and years of intense study (perhaps at Strixhaven!) and they tend to travel realms in search of new knowledge. For the most part, they're not particularly strong, but their spellcasting makes them powerful allies or enemies.

And then there are the barbarians, who can make magic with their fists. These are physically gifted fighters who come alive in the heat of battle. Their eyes roll back, they lose track of their higher minds, and they become bloodthirsty killing machines, mowing down foes without a second glance. In short, they're very fun... so long as they're on your team.

When forced to work together, these two mismatched pals can get into all kinds of high stakes situations. You can even roleplay over time that your wizard is the only person who can convince the barbarian to calm down.



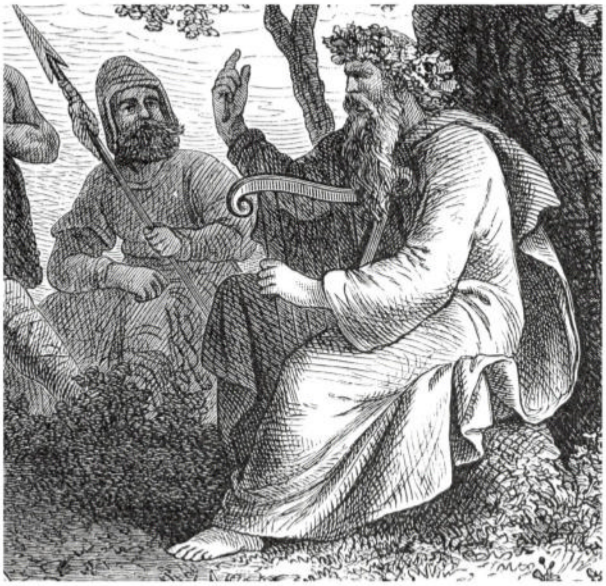
BARD & DRUID

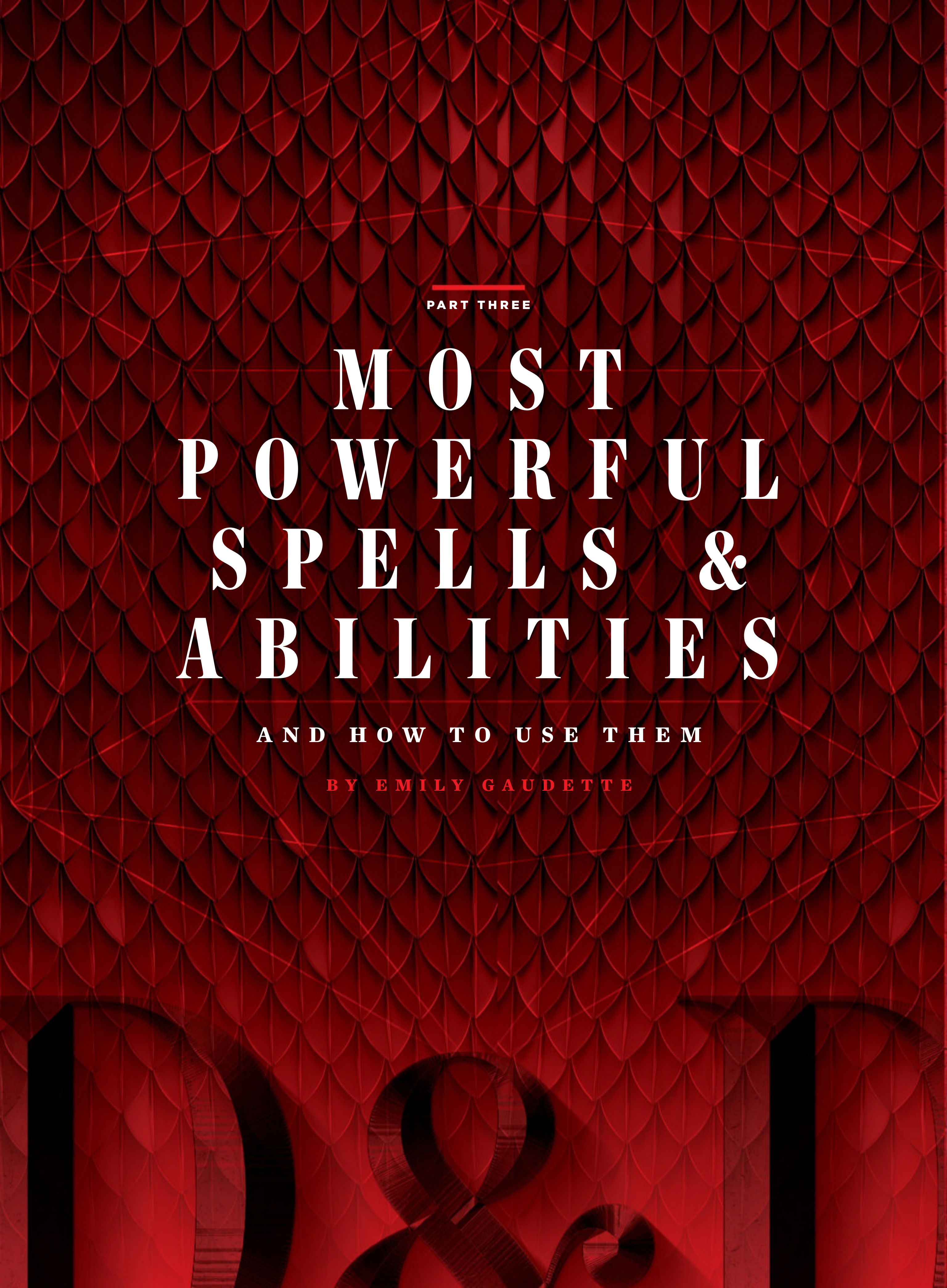
First of all, a bard's going to be entertaining when paired with anyone. But these two tricksters are often drawn to a bohemian lifestyle. One is a talented folk musician and the other is a talented mushroom forager. They're both barefoot and would rather talk themselves out of a jam than trade blows. Think they're both weaklings? You've never heard a lute played like this before.

A bard is a rare sort. Not every elf who picks up a lute is inherently gifted with that sweet combination of charisma, storytelling and an inflated ego that characterizes a bard, and the world is probably better for it. By nature, bards are often wallflowers in combat, encouraging their friends and intimidating their foes through song.

A druid can be played many ways, but they are essentially magic wielders whose interests lie solely in the natural world. Many are shapeshifters, preferring the forms of animals to their original bodies, and their alliances depend on how they see the winds of change moving through a realm.

Together, these two could prove an interesting pair of chaotic neutral forces. You could roleplay your party as constantly sneaking off to compare notes, as both of you will be searching for ways to avoid conflict and structure, and manipulate others into submission.





PART THREE

MOST POWERFUL SPELLS & ABILITIES

AND HOW TO USE THEM

BY EMILY GAUDETTE

We'd take pretty much any minor magical powers here on this plane of existence—just the idea of making something levitate offers a fleeting thrill. But in D&D, an ambitious player isn't satisfied with quick tricks of alchemy or mind-reading. As a campaign wears on, the true D&D character is always looking for more spellcasting power and trying to level up to the point where their character is able to move mountains, slay dragons and bend the very fabric of reality.

It takes hours of table time to even scratch the surface of what's possible, but if you're grinding out XP and wondering what kind of crazy magic is available for players at the top tier, look no further. These are the most barrier-smashing, show-stopping spells currently written into Dungeons & Dragons canon. Hold onto your wizard hats.

FORESIGHT

This one's a doozy because it bends the fourth wall between players and Dungeon Masters. If your ninth level spellcaster touches a willing creature, you can give that creature the temporary gift of seeing the future. They can no longer be surprised by foes, and they gain advantage on attack rolls, ability checks and saving throws. What's more? Enemies gain disadvantage on attack rolls. In a game that rests on random rolls of the dice, foresight is priceless.

TELEPORT

You and your party companions get into a jam? A seventh-level caster can yeet themselves and eight of their willing buddies from one location into any location they're familiar with. Depending on your background, that could mean any place, really, as long as it's on the same plane of existence. That means no popping off to the astral plane, unfortunately.

METEOR SWARM

If it's powerful enough to kill off the dinosaurs, it's powerful enough to pack a punch in D&D. If you're a ninth-level spellcaster, you can bring down some gargantuan balls of fire on your enemies, resulting in 20d6 fire damage and 20d6 bludgeoning damage. That'll obliterate all but the most formidable foes.

PSYCHIC SCREAM

Unleash the darkness inside you by blasting your foes with a wall of your sheer intellect. On a failed intelligence saving throw, your enemies will take 14d6 psychic damage and become stunned. Or, you know, dead. Likely dead.

DISINTEGRATE

This spell only requires a sixth-level caster, but if you pull it off, it's nearly impossible to reverse. You simply point at a foe and a tiny neon green ray sprouts from your finger, hitting the target with 10d6 + 40. If that kills them, they instantaneously burst into a cloud of dust and they can only be brought back to the living by the two most powerful spells on this list.

TRUE POLYMORPH

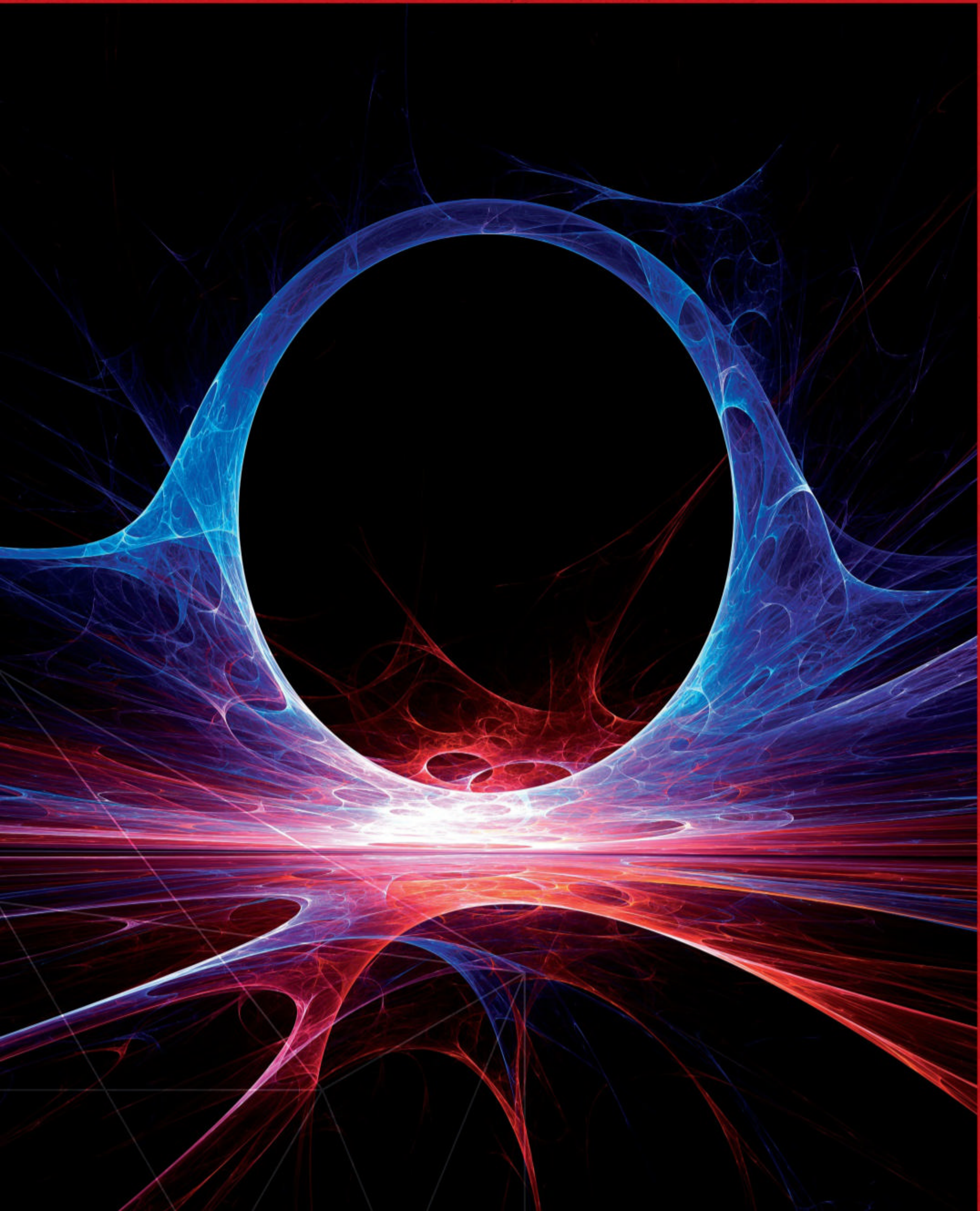
If there's one downside to playing as a fantastical character in D&D, it's the fact that you really only get to play as one at a time. This spell relieves that predicament, at least for a little while. A ninth-level caster can turn themselves into any creature they can see, absorbing their skills, hit points and alignment. Turn yourself into a white dragon and you can blast people with your cold breath—that's 12d8 damage!

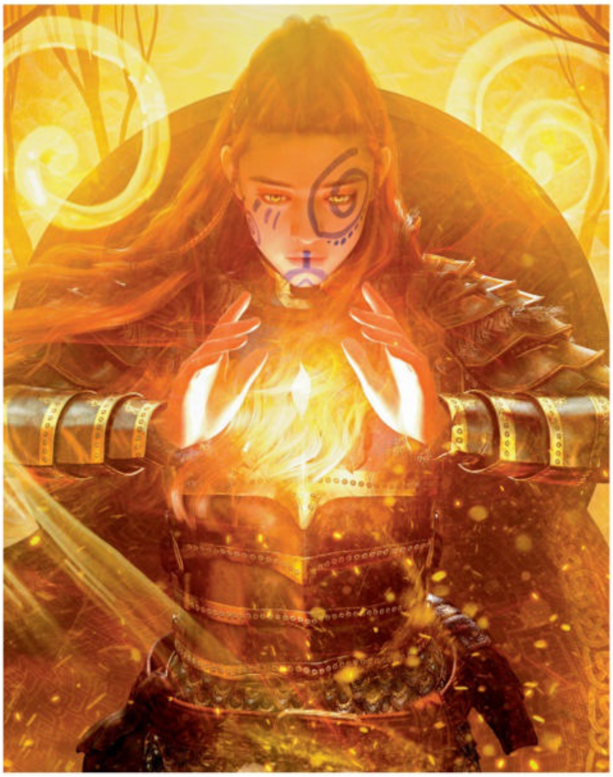
DARK STAR OR RAVENOUS VOID

These two powerhouse spells are remarkably similar in their impact—opening a black hole in the middle of a battlefield—but they carry somewhat different prerequisites. Dark Star is an eighth-level spell that requires anyone in its path to pass a constitution-saving throw, while Ravenous Void, slightly more advanced as a ninth-level spell, nails anyone that fails a strength roll. The resultant chaos can be a game-changer, as each spell continues to suck people and objects into their horrific voids until the spell is broken.

POWER WORD KILL

This is essentially D&D's version of avada kedavra, the spell spoken by a ninth-level caster that instantly kills a target with 100 hit points or fewer. They do not get a chance to defend, and there is no saving throw that can help.





WISH

Now this, this is the spell that bends reality. Your player looks upon the works of a Dungeon Master and says, no, that's not what we're doing. Fast forward through time, kill someone instantly or gain a legendary object. But be warned: most DMs like to treat Wish as a monkey's paw. So if you want something, describe it in as much detail as possible, or they're likely to twist your words against you.

TRUE RESURRECTION

One of only two ways to reverse disintegrate, this spell is every necromancer's white whale. You need a sprinkle of holy water and a diamond worth at least 25,000 gp in order to make it work, but if you're wealthy, you can bring back any creature that died more recently than 200 years ago by unnatural causes. They'll be free of wounds, cured of poisons and resorted to life with full hit points.

PART FOUR

BECOME A GRAND MASTER

TIPS TO BEING A GREAT DM

BY EMILY GAUDETTE

Are you creative? Meticulous? Willing to read hundreds of pages of rules and lore and then use them as inspiration in concocting your own complex, action-packed adventure that will keep four or five friends entertained for hours on end?

Congratulations, you may have what it takes to be a Dungeon Master—now strap in and get ready to learn.

Being a great Dungeon Master requires imagination, patience and flexibility. Building a campaign is a balancing act. If you put too much focus on world-building and showing off your storytelling skills, it could start to grate on your players, especially if you don't have the basics down first. Should you get too caught up in rules, you're sure to annoy those that want to let the adventure roll on. And without the right twists and turns, you're going to bore them very quickly.

It's all about shaping your players' world around their preferences for the game — especially the preferences they don't even know they have. Here are three top tips to excelling as a Dungeon Master.

1. DECIDE ON YOUR VISUALS

The action may take place in people's imagination, but there's got to be some shared understanding of where exactly the party is heading. Whether you're managing a game remotely or in-person, you're going to have to define the way your players see the imaginary world they're exploring.

The classic method of DMing involves using mini figures and some hexagonal paper for encounters, although you can do without those hexagons if you simply use a small tape measure to regulate distance between figurines. There are also show-stopping D&D set-ups, like Joe Manganiello's incredible refinished basement, and those involve everything from scale models of environments to little smoke machines and soundboards.

Don't stress, though, because you don't have to empty your cold purse to provide visuals. You can reveal character faces, monsters and storefronts on a laptop screen, with an iPad, or if you're playing in a classroom, by using a projector. All the art you could possibly need is available online, although your

CHAPTER 2

players will no doubt welcome you providing your own original drawings.

If you're playing remotely, tools like Roll20 allow you to whisk your players' avatars through 2D digital worlds, complete with interactive lighting and art that shows their proximity to the rest of the party. You can create your own stuff, or browse what's available on Roll20's creator marketplace.

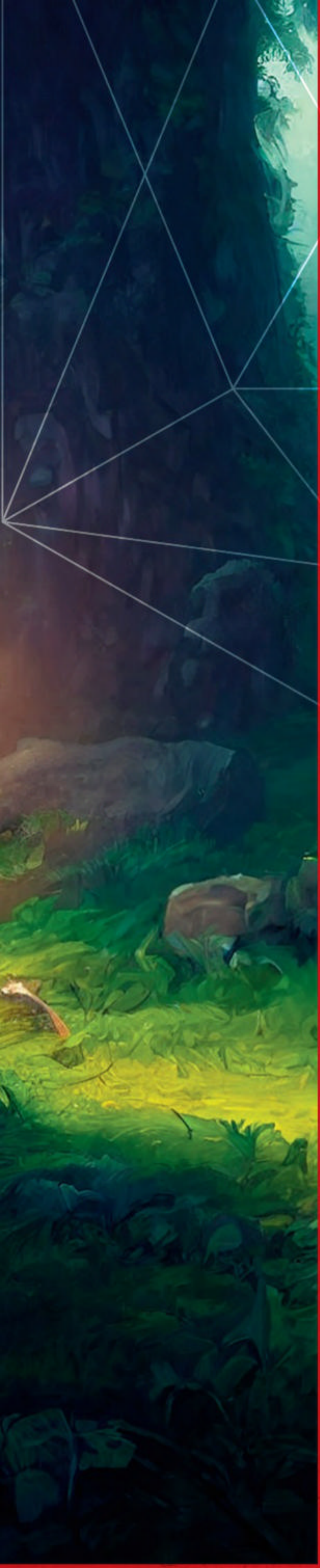
2. MAKE YOUR PLAYERS CHOOSE CERTAIN THINGS BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Many aspects of the game are up to you as DM, but if you want your players to feel heard, they'll ultimately have a better time if they help set some of the ground rules. For instance, how deadly do they want their game to be? Are they okay with their characters possibly dying, and if so, do they want death to come as a result of their choices, or random happenstance?

Ask your players before a campaign for their ideal breakdown between roleplay and combat. Are they more interested in a political game of intrigue, playing NPCs against each other, or do they want to enter a dungeon and play through a meat grinder to level their characters up? If you're running a homebrew of your own design, do they want to be in a particular environment? Are they more interested in fighting creatures or spellcasters?

Of course, you can choose any of this stuff for your players, but making amendments to the campaign based on what they like is always going to go well.

CHAPTER 2



3. ALWAYS GIVE THE ILLUSION OF CHOICE, EVEN WHEN RAILROADING

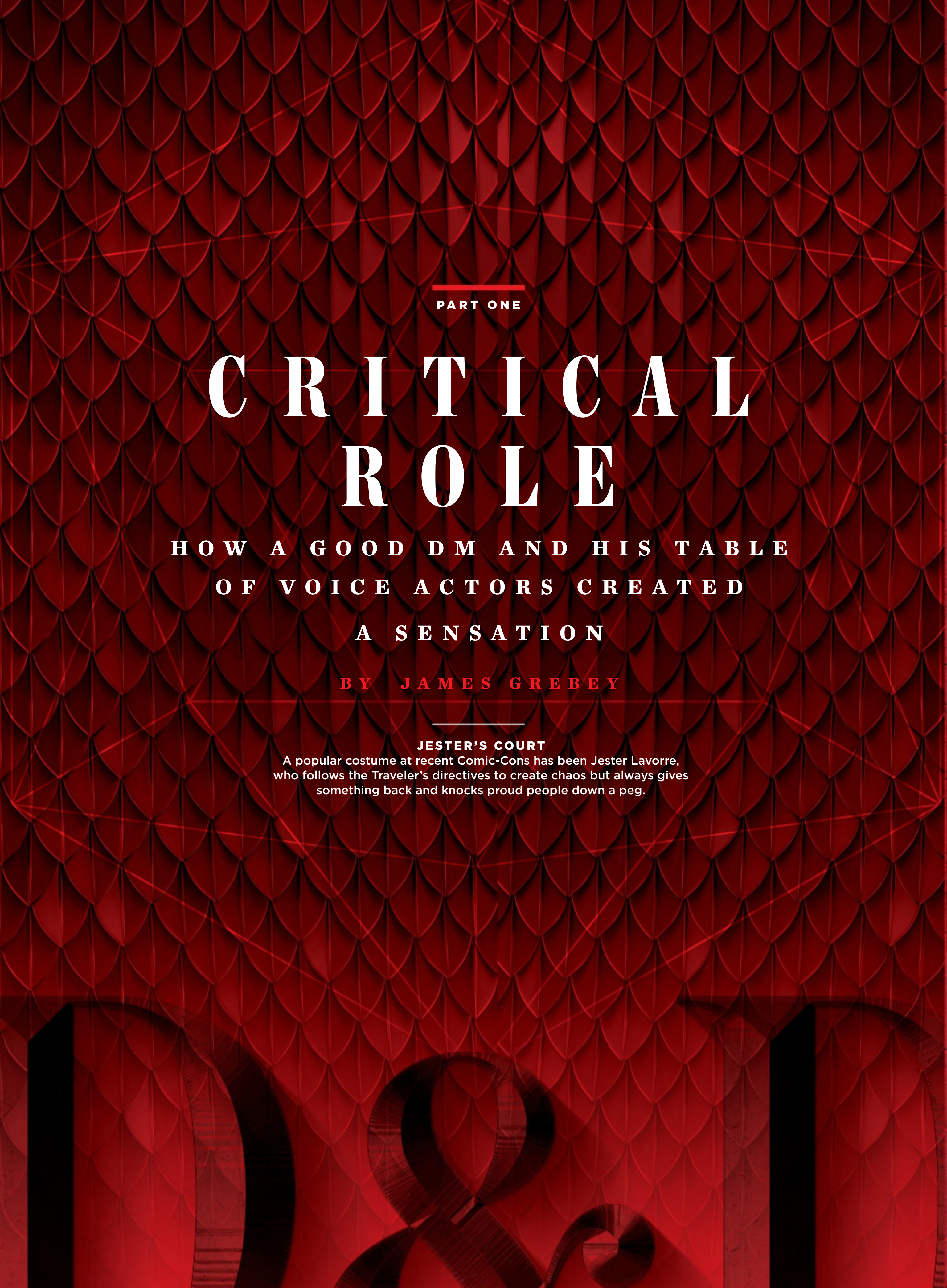
Sometimes you just need your players to quit the talking and get moving to the good stuff. That's fine, as long as you keep the process behind the DM screen. Players typically hate the sensation that their characters' choices don't have any bearing on the game, because it allows apathy to creep into their minds. So give them little choices throughout the journey: complex maps that really only lead to one place, various ways to get around foes and puzzles (if your players are into those!).

If you find yourself saddled with a group that enjoys testing boundaries, resist the urge to "punish" them for not playing along by damaging your own story. No matter what, the goal of D&D is enjoying an entertaining few hours together.

CHAPTER 3

FOR

FUN & PROFIT



PART ONE

CRITICAL ROLE

HOW A GOOD DM AND HIS TABLE OF VOICE ACTORS CREATED A SENSATION

BY JAMES GREBEY

JESTER'S COURT
A popular costume at recent Comic-Cons has been Jester Lavorre, who follows the Traveler's directives to create chaos but always gives something back and knocks proud people down a peg.

How do you describe *Critical Role* to the uninitiated? Every member of the eight-person cast has their own best attempt to explain what it is that they do, and why it is that millions of people tune in each week to watch a group of friends play Dungeons & Dragons for four or more hours a session.

"I describe it as a long-form improv series set in a super-rich fantasy world. An adventure radio play, made up on the spot!" Sam Rigel, best known as the gnomish bard Scanlan Shorthalt on *Critical Role*, explained to *Time* magazine. As far as explanations go, it's a pretty good one, though even then it doesn't fully capture the nuances of the format, the crucial role of D&D, the passionate fan community, or the multimedia empire that arose from small beginnings.

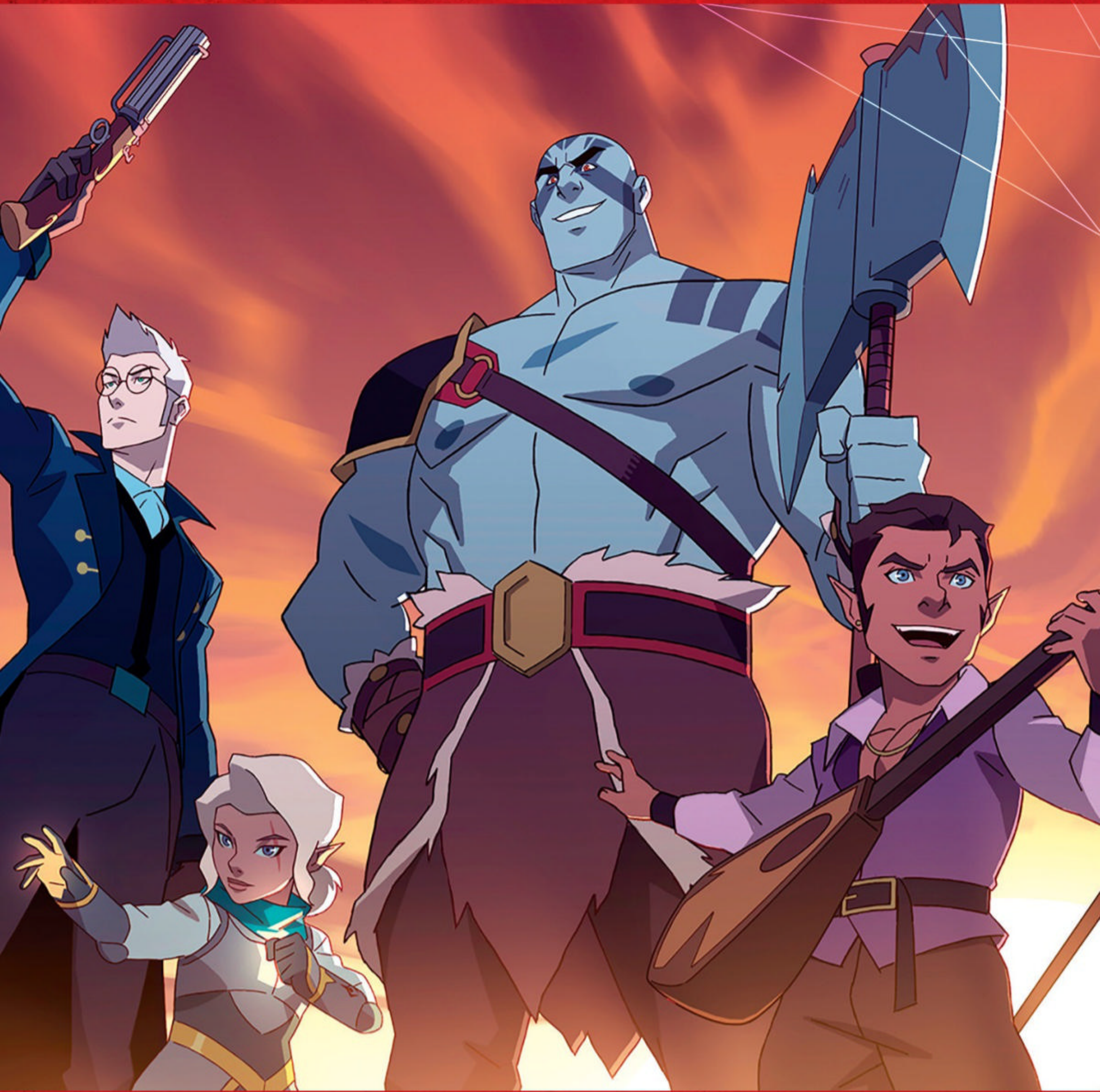
"If we're in a hurry, we find our tagline for the show is often the sword to the Gordian knot that is *Critical Role*," offers Marisha Ray, who is known for playing the spooky sorcerer Laudna. "We're just a bunch of nerdy-ass voice actors sitting around a table playing Dungeons & Dragons."

As with any good fantasy epic, *Critical Role* had humble origins. Longtime D&D fan Matthew Mercer organized a one-off game to celebrate his friend Liam O'Brien's birthday in late 2012, which doubled as an introduction to the game for most attendees. They were soon hooked, and the group continued the campaign for two years, regularly

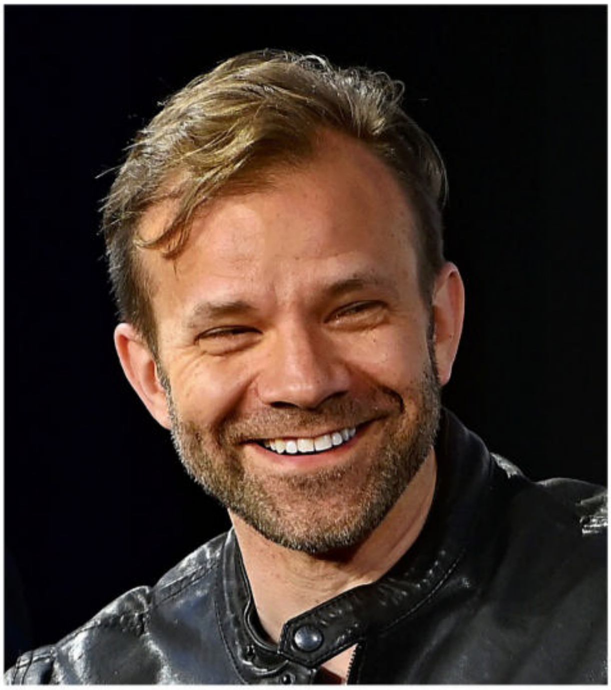
CRITICAL ROMANCE Marisha Ray and Matthew Mercer (opposite page) got married on Oct. 21, 2017, in between the first and second *Critical Role* campaigns.

LEGENDARY CAST
Among the main *Vox Machina* characters are (from left) Percival de Rolo, Pike Trickfoot, Grog Strongjaw and Scanlan Shorthalt.

CROWN KEEPER
A member of the main cast of *Critical Role*, Liam O'Brien (right) plays Orym in the third campaign after having played Vax'ildan and Caleb Widogast in previous campaigns.



WE ALL KNEW WE HAD STUMBLED INTO SOMETHING SPECIAL



playing in private. “I didn’t figure it would last more than a single night!” says O’Brien, the birthday boy who played the half-elven rogue Vax’ildan in the first campaign. “All I knew at the end of that first game was that I had to do it again and that it had to be with these people. It was immediately electric and we all knew we had stumbled into something special.”

Eventually, they were encouraged to live stream their games, first as part of the web series production company Geek & Sundry and then under their own company. New episodes, which are filmed in a snazzy studio built just for this purpose, debut on Thursday nights on Twitch and are later uploaded to YouTube and made available in podcast format.

“When we were first asked to turn our home game into a live streamed series, we thought it was a terrible idea,” Riegel says. “And I think we’re all very grateful to have been proven wrong.”

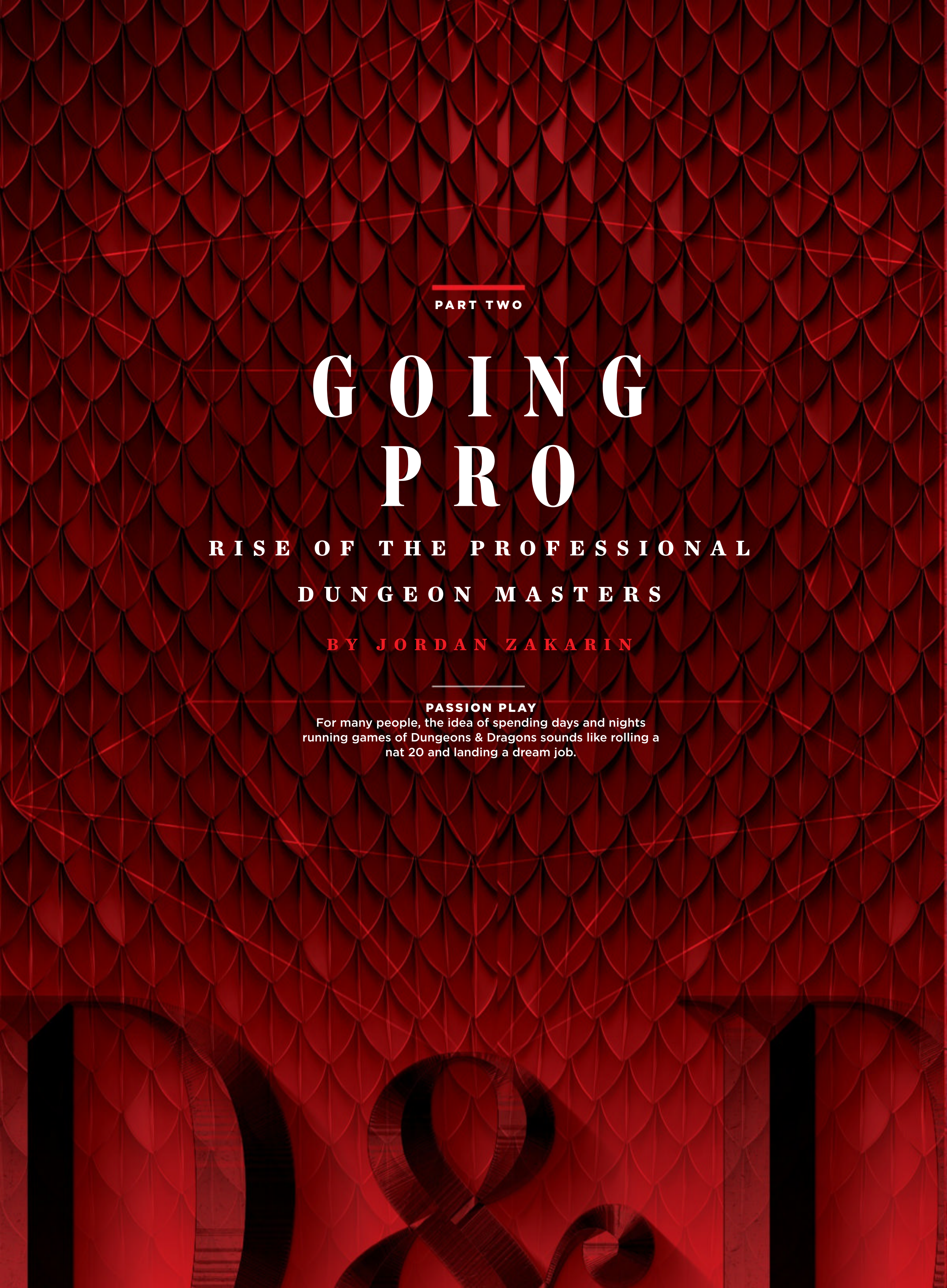
Wrong indeed. *Critical Role* soon became a sensation. Now, seven years later, some 1.5 million people watch each episode of the currently ongoing third campaign. *Critical Role* has also spawned comic book and prose spin-offs, toys and collectibles, and official D&D books made in collaboration with the company behind the iconic game.

In 2019, the cast launched a Kickstarter campaign with the intention of raising money to produce one 22-minute animated special. They raised $11.3 million—15 times more than the original goal, enough to break all sorts of records and fund way more than just one single special. Amazon Prime Video acquired the streaming rights to what was now a full-blown series, *The Legend of Vox Machina*. The first season premiered in early 2022, and a second season, which further adapts the events of the first campaign, is in the works.

“The fantasy of turning your home game into an animated series or comic book is almost a cliche,” says Taliesin Jaffe, who voices his gun-slinging character Percival de Rolo in the show. “And yet here we are, actually getting to see our characters running around for everyone else to see. It’s amazing.”

Why have so many people fallen for *Critical Role*’s spell? There are other D&D actual play series, including *The Adventure Zone*, *Acquisitions Incorporated* and *Rude Tales of Magic*, but even among such good company, *Critical Role* is something special. The production values are great, the story they create at the table is top-notch fantasy, and Mercer is an exceptional Dungeon Master spinning a yarn with exceptional players, but everyone in the cast attributes some of the success to the very thing that got them playing in the first place: friendship.

“This entire game is built on trust and friendship of the deepest level, and that sort of authenticity brings forth an infectious joy that cannot be manufactured—and we invite folks to come and join us as we experience these stories together,” Mercer says. “We made a promise to each other that if it ever became too stressful, or took away our own enjoyment of such a personal passion, we would stop,” Ray says. “I am thrilled to say that hasn’t happened.”



PART TWO

GOING PRO

RISE OF THE PROFESSIONAL DUNGEON MASTERS

BY JORDAN ZAKARIN

PASSION PLAY
For many people, the idea of spending days and nights running games of Dungeons & Dragons sounds like rolling a nat 20 and landing a dream job.

SUCCEEDING AS A PRO DUNGEON MASTER IS NO EASY FEAT

Between all the reading, painstaking planning and countless hours spent acting as a guide, entertainer and peacemaker for other players, being a Dungeon Master can sometimes feel like a full-time job. For some DMs, it is becoming exactly that.

The quarantine-induced explosion of interest in Dungeons & Dragons turned a niche hobby into a national sensation and created an unprecedented phenomenon. Enthusiasm for D&D was at an all-time high, and the number of people interested in playing the game far outstripped the supply of well-versed, battle-tested Dungeon Masters… or people who knew how to DM at all.

While many parties were guided by rookies that learned the rules on the fly, no small number of D&D newcomers hired professional Dungeon Masters to shepherd their quests.

DUNGEON MASTER DEGREES

For many people, the idea of spending days and nights running games of Dungeons & Dragons sounds like rolling a nat 20 and landing a dream job. And naturally, you'd be hard-pressed to find a DM that doesn't hold a deep reverence for tabletop roleplaying. But while loving D&D is a prerequisite, succeeding as a pro Dungeon Master is no easy feat.

A good DM wears many hats. They do the work of a fantasy writer, a digital designer, a tour guide, a storyteller and a performer—and depending on the dynamics of the party, they may even have to play mediator and/or therapist every now and again. It's an expansive job description, and one that ultimately requires countless hours of gametime to master.

To help aspiring DMs get there faster, a number of online training centers have cropped up in recent years, some with syllabuses that would rival many undergrad majors. Perhaps the most intensive is Dungeon Master University, which offers classes in writing characters and settings, dramatic narration and performance, and even gameplay psychology.

The nod for most competitive, meanwhile, belongs to Camp Dragon. The DM academy admits only a fraction of applicants to its training program, and requires an audition and interviews from prospective DMs. An organization called Geek Therapeutics offers Therapeutic Game Master certificates to those that complete its mental health-focused training.

For aspiring DMs looking to keep their gold, there are many other resources, including YouTube videos, that walk people through the more complicated aspects of Dungeon Master training, too.

THE TREASURE

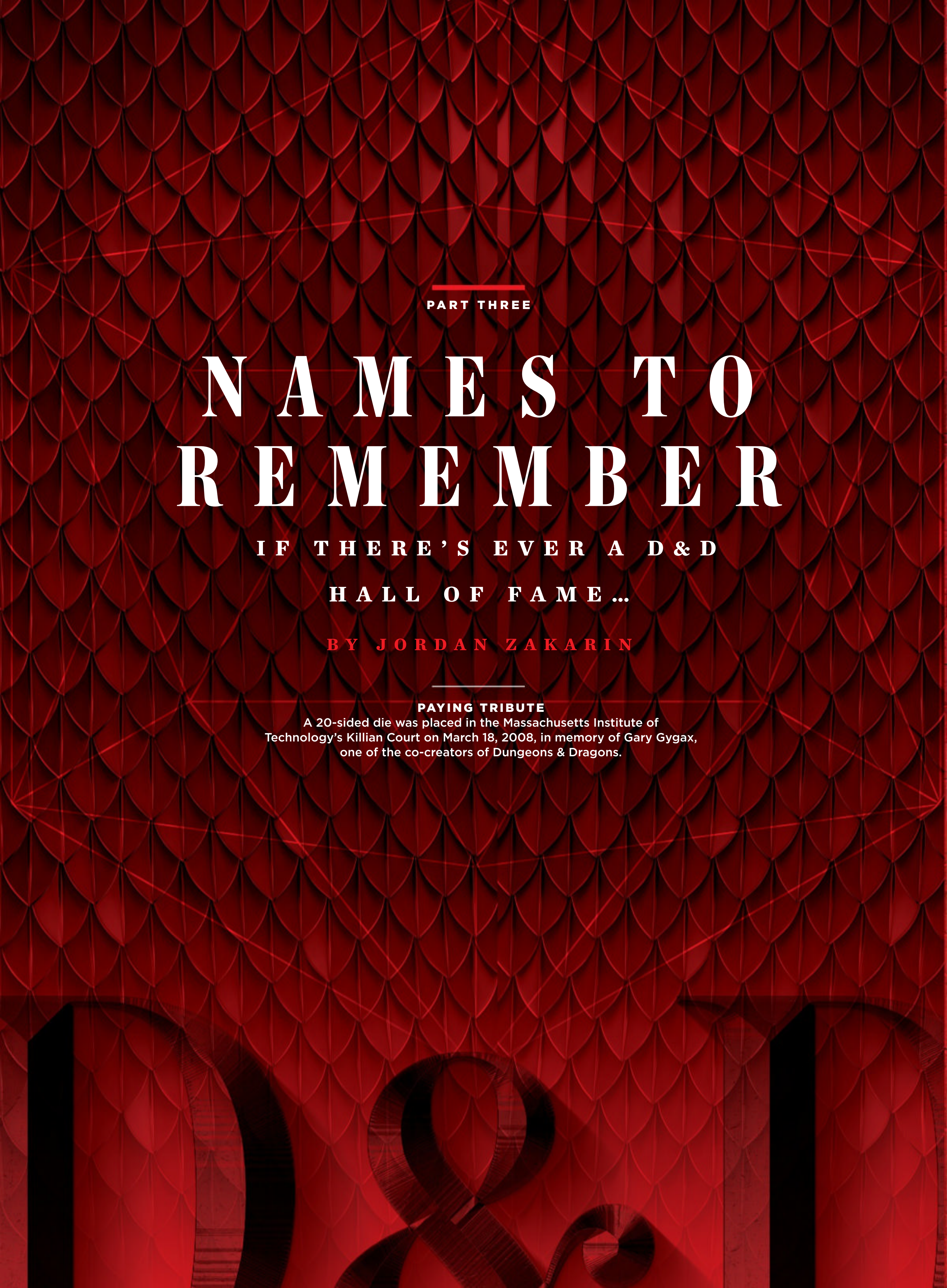
Dungeons & Dragons' emergence into the mainstream has turned what was once a niche hobby into very big business. The game is said to bring in somewhere between $100 and $150 million in annual revenue for its publisher, Wizards of the Coast, but that number only scratches the surface of the D&D economy.

There's no industry standard rate for pro Dungeon Masters quite yet, and the pay range can vary based on a plethora of factors. DMs generally ask for more money to run a one-off game than what they charge per session for a regularly recurring campaign, while a homebrew story will obviously command a higher price than a game derived from a Campaign Setting. Some Dungeon Masters will charge $10-20 per player each session, while others ask for a flat fee that can reach into the hundreds of dollars.

It's not just hobbyists that hire Dungeon Masters, either. Practitioners and educators are increasingly using D&D to stimulate learning, foster teamwork and trust, and process trauma and addiction. A professional Dungeon Master with the right training can make a positive impact in the lives of everyone from children at games organized at the public library to patients working through their demons at rehab centers. It is, truly, a noble calling.

MASTER CLASS
Robert Swift serves as a Dungeon Master in a December 2019 game at the Adventure Pub in Arlington, Massachusetts.

TREASURE TROVE
While some Dungeon Masters charge $10-20 per player each session, others ask for a flat fee that can reach into the hundreds of dollars.



PART THREE

NAMES TO REMEMBER

IF THERE'S EVER A D&D HALL OF FAME...

BY JORDAN ZAKARIN

PAYING TRIBUTE
A 20-sided die was placed in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Killian Court on March 18, 2008, in memory of Gary Gygax, one of the co-creators of Dungeons & Dragons.

ITVTE OF TECHNOLOGY
8
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In Memory of
GARY GYGAX
July 27 1938-March 4 2008
who led us on so many
wonderful adventures

Live streams, podcasts and massive convention events have turned the stars of *Critical Role,* and a number of other ongoing campaigns, into modern D&D icons. Many recent converts have been lured into battle thanks to these players. But the world of Dungeons & Dragons, and its broader universe, was built by generations of creative geniuses.

D&D owes its past, present and future to five full decades of artists, storytellers, authors and designers from all around the (real) world. Some have become legends in their own right, but others have receded into tabletop history, their names lost during this 50-year campaign. Here are some unsung heroes who have shaped D&D over the years.

GARY GYGAX & DAVE ARNESON

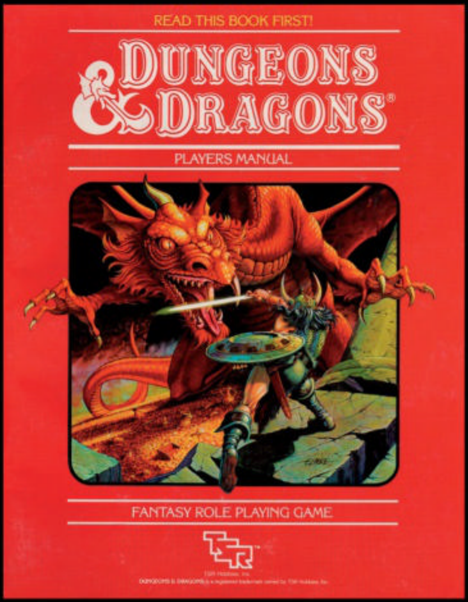
Exactly who is responsible for which original elements of Dungeons & Dragons remains the subject of intense debate that is unlikely to ever be settled. But however credit is assigned, these two names are forever etched in history.

Arneson was the creative genius who ran late night tabletop improv sessions in the Twin Cities, which built on and transformed early niche RPGs. One of those games had been designed by Gygax, a young father of five who rewrote and playtested Arneson's games at his home in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin.

Their brief meetings and long distance correspondence shaped what became the first edition of D&D, and they worked together briefly after that, but the partnership ended by 1976; Arneson sued Gygax for credit and royalties in 1979. They remained rivals even after the case settled in 1981. Lennon and McCartney they were not, but their brief partnership spawned one of the great cultural creations of the second half of the 20th century.

FOUNDING FATHERS
Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson are among the co-authors of the *Dungeons & Dragons Players Manual* that was released in 1983.

D&D WAS BUILT BY GENERATIONS OF CREATIVE GENIUSES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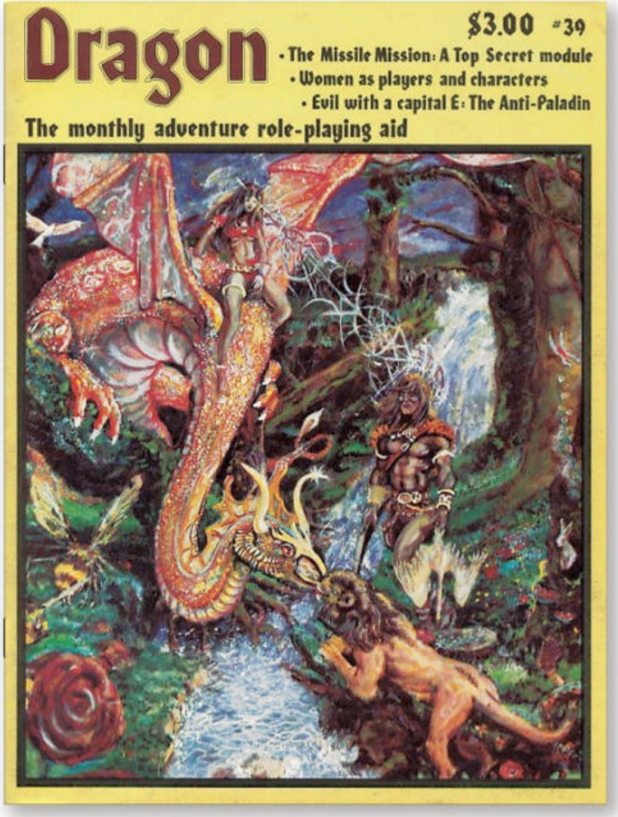
Dragon
$3.00 #39
• The Missile Mission: A Top Secret module
• Women as players and characters
• Evil with a capital E: The Anti-Paladin
The monthly adventure role-playing aid

JEAN WELLS & DARLENE

Jean Wells was introduced to D&D on a canoe trip with some friends during college. She was immediately hooked, ordered the game for herself, and bought a subscription to *The Dragon*, the new D&D magazine published by TSR, Inc., the company that Gygax set up to publish the game. One letter to Gygax later and Wells was the first woman designer that Gygax ever hired, and she immediately put her stamp on both the game and the surrounding culture.

As a staffer, she designed and edited for several early modules and books. She also became a columnist for *The Dragon*, where she dished advice to players and spoke out about the misogynistic culture percolating around a game played in large part by men and boys. Fittingly, she may be best known for her design work on the module Palace of the Silver Princess, which was pulled off the market and reworked once executives noticed its risque artwork. She left in 1981 but her legacy remains.

Darlene—she goes by one name, like Prince or Cher—began working for TSR as a freelancer following a boyfriend who also worked at the company. Her art spoke for itself, however, and it didn't take long for her to take an integral role in producing some of the most iconic early settings and other media material.

LARRY ELMORE & JEFF EASLEY

One of the great fantasy artists of his time (and at 74, still active today), Elmore joined TSR the same year that Wells departed. He was prolific during his time on staff, creating concept art, illustrating covers, drawing comics, and helping to design the iconic Dragonlance setting. He left in 1987 to provide his skills to the broader fantasy genre, on which his art has left an indelible mark.

Elmore was vital in bringing an acquaintance named Jeff Easley to TSR a year later. Easley made similarly important contributions to D&D, and may be best known for his cover work on a plethora of rulebooks, guides, Monster Manuals and game boxes. He was involved with Dragonlance as well, painting the cover for the main book.

JON PETERSON

Peterson hasn't written any Dungeons & Dragons settings or books; instead, he's written *the* book, quite literally, on Dungeons & Dragons. He is the leading scholar on the history and culture of D&D and tabletop gaming, including the 2021 best-seller *Game Wizards*, which chronicles the creation of the game, its early days and that messy relationship between Gygax and Arneson.

PETERSON IS THE LEADING SCHOLAR ON D&D HISTORY AND CULTURE

WOMAN'S TOUCH
Jean Wells co-wrote a feature titled, "Women Want Equality: And Why Not?" for the July 1980 issue of *Dragon* (left).

THE WRITE STUFF
Jon Peterson (below) is the author of the 2021 best-seller *Game Wizards,* which chronicles the creation of Dungeons & Dragons.

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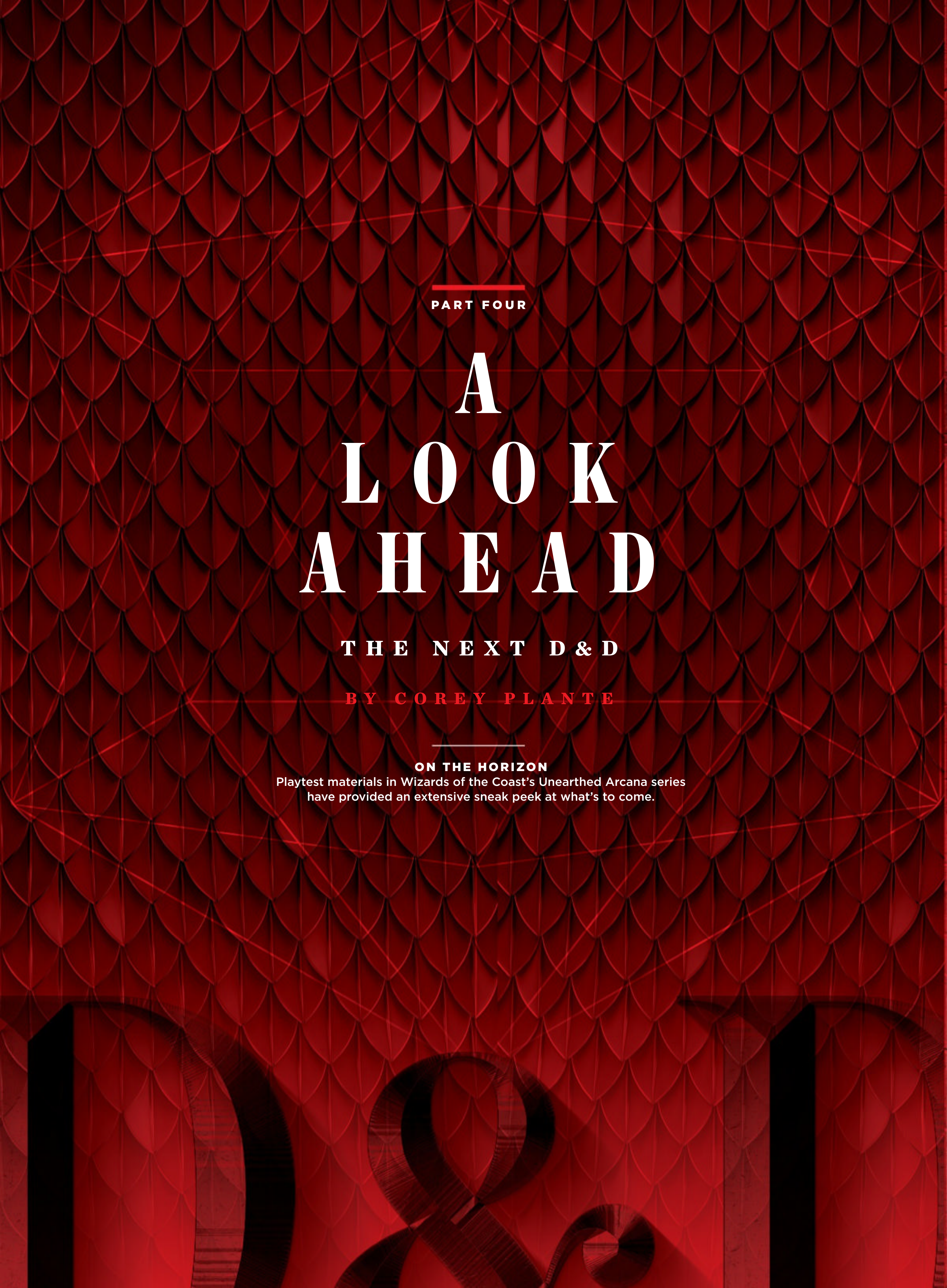

PART FOUR

A LOOK AHEAD

THE NEXT D&D

BY COREY PLANTE

ON THE HORIZON
Playtest materials in Wizards of the Coast's Unearthed Arcana series have provided an extensive sneak peek at what's to come.

The golden age of Dungeons & Dragons is only getting brighter.

In August 2022, Wizards of the Coast announced the first big addition to the game since the 2014 publication of Dungeons & Dragons 5th edition. Being called "One D&D," this won't simply be the game's 6th edition, Wizards promises, but something "bigger than that."

One D&D will make updates both big and small to existing game rules. The most noteworthy change—and perhaps why the update emphasizes unity in its branding—is that everything will be backward compatible with 5th edition. Nothing will become obsolete, so everyone's 5e characters can migrate easily into the One D&D era.

Official books are slated for release sometime in 2024, but in true D&D fashion, playtest materials in Wizards of the Coast's Unearthed Arcana series have already provided an extensive sneak peek at what's to come.

Many of the core rules will remain fundamentally the same. You'll still be rolling a 20-sided die to determine whether an attack or skill check is a success or failure, and character sheets will still have all of the same ability scores and skills. The adjusted mechanics mostly focus on character creation thus far: A character's background (or personal history) will influence ability scores, changing the old paradigm that tied them to race. Hybrid races like Half-Elves and Half-Orcs have also been phased out, but the game now has official guidance for creating any hybrid. So you can finally make that half-halfling you've dreamt of to kickstart conversations about quarterlings.

The previously optional Feats mechanic—which gives a character a special ability based on experience or training—will become a core aspect of every character's Background during character creation. For example, any character can take the Magic Initiate Feat at level 1 and learn a few magic

DUNGEON MASTER'S GUIDE
PLAYER'S HANDBOOK
DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

SIXTH EDITION
One D&D has the potential to alter the face of Dungeons & Dragons through changes to such elements as character creation, spells and the way that certain classes work.

PLAYTESTING AND PLAYER FEEDBACK DRIVE SUCCESS

spells, even if they're a brawny barbarian. On the flip side, somebody could make a wizard who's really good at fist fights due to the Tavern Brawler Feat.

It seems as if One D&D will emphasize role-playing even more than 5th edition. The way that classes and magic spells are organized is also getting an interesting rework that emphasizes a character's role. Class Groups include Experts, Mages, Priests and Warriors with three or four classes in each, and the final version of One D&D will have 48 subclasses for the 13 core classes.

One D&D also includes two other major initiatives that'll expand the game into other mediums. Most exciting is an immersive online tabletop simulator tentatively called the "Digital D&D Play Experience." When countless players took their D&D games digital during the pandemic, many of them used tabletop simulators like Roll20 to play in custom-made 2D environments. This new platform, however, is stunningly realized in Unreal Engine, one of the video game industry's most robust graphics engines. Dungeon Masters will be able to design highly detailed 3D environments, complete with virtual miniatures for characters and monsters, and simulate official D&D gameplay.

It would seem as if the biggest lesson that Wizards of the Coast has learned from the ongoing development of the 5th edition is that playtesting and player feedback drive the game's overall (and overwhelming) success. One D&D seeks to capitalize on that same approach to game design, one that mirrors the relationship between the Dungeon Master and players—a collaborative experience where the players are an equally important part of the storytelling.

STUNNING WORLDS
In One D&D, DMs will be able to design highly detailed 3D environments, complete with virtual miniatures for characters and monsters.

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THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

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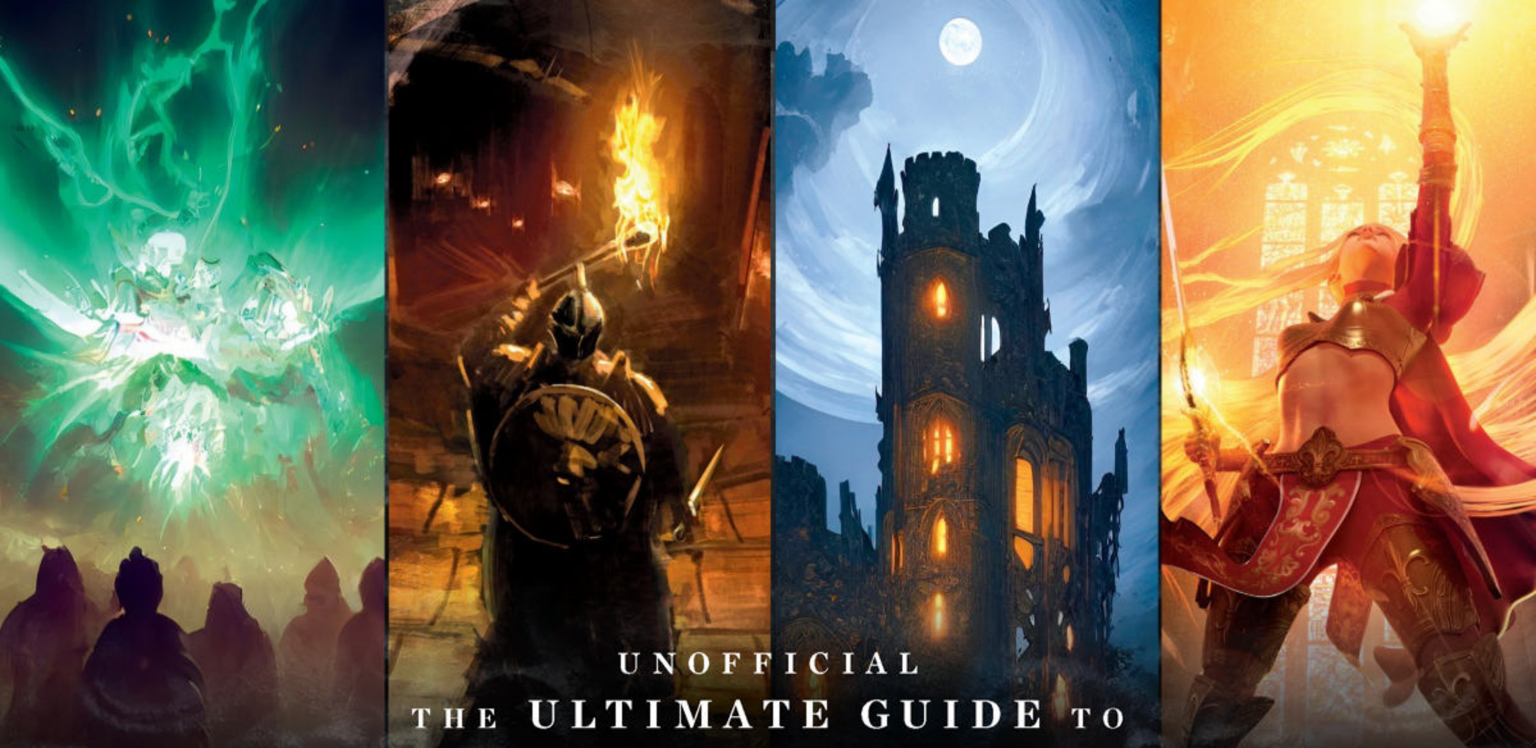

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THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO D&D

Dungeons & Dragons has continued to expand over the past 50 years while also setting the template for generations of new games, movies and literature. In a game that plays out in the imagination, the possibilities are endless.